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**Essays in Philosophy
ANCIENT**

Stanley Rosen

Edited and with an Introduction by Martin Black



St. Augustine's Press
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Introduction

Martin Black

This is the first of two volumes of philosophical essays by Stanley Rosen to be published by St. Augustine's Press. Rosen is the author of some fifteen books and well over one hundred articles devoted to philosophical topics, in addition to his first publication, a book of poetry. He has explored many of the most important themes in philosophy, and provided interpretations of many of its most significant figures, especially Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Strauss, and Kojève. Rosen's work would be remarkable for its breadth were it not also characterized by a penetration into the fundamental questions that makes it extraordinary. The two main strands of his writings, commentary on the most powerful thinkers and explorations of the crucial philosophical problems, blend into one another in Rosen's focus upon ordinary life and speech as the ambiguous, but sole non-arbitrary medium for our understanding and criticism of extraordinary thoughts and experiences.

The essays collected here were composed over the last five decades. They were selected from publications in various journals and books, some of which are now out of print or otherwise difficult of access, as well as from unpublished lectures. The Acknowledgements shows the details of prior publication. It should be noted that the essays are not placed in chronological order, although they are distributed into two volumes by their focus upon ancient and modern themes and authors. This convenient division is not intended to imply a doctrinal chasm between ancient and modern thought. On the contrary, it is one of Rosen's arguments that those of us who wish to preserve or appropriate the wisdom of the ancients are best served by the demonstration that, despite the varying theoretical and practical demands of different epochs, both parties address the permanent questions coeval with human nature.

If there is such a nature, then superiority belongs to the same kind of work as the average, as Aristotle wisely says.¹ The remainder of this introduction is intended to provide some context for the essays that follow for readers relatively new to Rosen's work.²

Stanley Rosen's life as a philosopher and his career as a teacher occurred in a time when most intellectual authorities in one way or another denied that philosophy in the classical sense is possible, because they denied that there is a human nature. Rosen's first philosophical work was a comprehensive study of Plato's *Symposium*, and his second was *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay*.³ The former work provides an interpretation of the Platonic dialogue most obviously devoted to the quarrel between poetry and philosophy, a first and thus a vital meaning of which is whether reason can supplant the poetic tradition as the guide for political or human life. Its deeper senses include the question whether, in our fundamental experiences, the higher place is occupied by creating or making, on the one hand, or by seeing and knowing, on the other; *Erfinden* or *Finden*. That is to say, are human beings self-creating, which may be taken to mean the creatures of the poets, or are they beings who have some genuine ability to know themselves and to choose the better over the worse? Rosen's study is one of those uncommon works in which philological responsibility of a high order is ministerial to the task of philosophical self-understanding. Among its many effects, it made it impossible to read Plato without taking into account the philosophical intention of the dialogue form. This topic had been, and has since been, the subject of important discussions by many commentators. However, Rosen's book made a decisive contribution to the critique of the neglect of the poetic aspect of Plato's self-presentation, and then reintegrated that aspect within a philosophical vision of the whole.

Nihilism dissected for review the historical roots and contemporary florescence of the denial that there is a human nature or that there are intelligible principles of thought and action. Rosen traces this denial from the dislocation between reason and the good in early modern thought, through its key developments in Rousseau and the German idealists, and subjects to critique its late forms in both analytical and continental thought, especially in Wittgenstein

and Heidegger. At all stages Rosen forms a dialogue between the most powerful sources of the contemporary form of nihilism with the classical philosophers, and finally proposes a new paradigm of philosophy. This is an astonishingly bold and exciting work, but the paradigm suggested was intended to be new in the sense that it speaks to our peculiar history and in its idiom, as well as against the most powerful intellectual tendencies of the times. It was not intended to be original in the sense of a free creation, but rather to show that it is impossible that our self-understanding be either a free creation or reducible to a modern science. This demonstration of the visibility of the difference between meaningful speech and nonsense in the absence of a complete discursive account of human nature constitutes a demonstration of the possibility of philosophy that remains true to our imperfect or "in-between" character. What strikes the reader of the book initially is the analytical power animating the author's comprehension of so many of the most difficult philosophical issues and teachings. Yet, while *Nihilism* has a manifestly polemical cast, the abiding impression is of the author's evident passion to see in each issue and in each author what is true and valuable, and what one can learn from them for oneself.

The themes of the crisis of modern thought and the reexamination of classical philosophy were decisively informed by the work of Rosen's teacher, Leo Strauss. Several of the essays in this volume express Rosen's appreciation of and for Strauss's work, as well as the reasons for his departure from it and so for the character of his own achievement. The first chapter in this volume, "Chicago Days," is a memoir that revivifies something of the atmosphere of the University of Chicago in its heyday in the forties and fifties. It complements a previous essay devoted to the other decisive figure in Rosen's philosophical education, Alexander Kojève.⁴ "Chicago Days" also mentions other students of Strauss, in particular Seth Benardete, and in the version printed here it is supplemented by Rosen's eulogy for another distinguished teacher, the classicist David Grene.⁵ It is notable that as Rosen turns from the primarily theoretical to the primarily practical, from philosophy to the genesis of his own understanding, he allows the ever present but generally

suppressed wit of his prose to come to the surface. However, the necessary particularity of memoirs shouldn't distract us from the more serious questions they raise about the learning of philosophy or the problems set for and by the students of powerful and charismatic thinkers.

The meaning of a genuine teacher for his or her students is almost incidentally suggested in a passage in *Nihilism*, a book that is dedicated to Strauss and Kojève, in the course of Rosen's interpretation of "the idea of the good" in Plato's *Republic*:

... is there available in our ordinary experience an icon of what Socrates means by the "vision" or "prophecy" of the good? I believe that there is—the good man. A good man, as we observe him within our daily lives, is not "useful for..." in the same sense that tools, food, acts, even just and beautiful things exhibit utility. Entirely apart from the happiness which may justly accrue to the good man because of his consciousness that he is good, there is a certain fulfillment, completion or perfection which shines forth from such a man, and which we too admire, even perhaps without envy or desire, because of its splendor.⁶

On the one hand, it is difficult not to see in this statement a reflection on the meaning of Rosen's admiration for his teachers, those mentioned above and perhaps others such as Father Féssard. On the other hand, this statement is part of a reconstitution of the arguments variously made by Plato and Aristotle for the priority of the theoretical over the practical life. As the conjunction of these suggestions implies, this statement suggests the mutual necessity of the intelligible principle and the living instance, a thought integral to Rosen's defense of what are normally called the Platonic forms. These remarks do not begin to do justice to the delicacy and power of the full interpretation in its original context. Those of us fortunate enough to have been students of Rosen can testify that his example of living thought, not to mention his generosity and loyalty as a teacher, has furnished us with just such a *paradeigma* of the philosophical life.⁷

One does not imitate an example of a responsible and resplendent thinker by imitating what he says but by thinking for oneself. In the

case of Leo Strauss, his extraordinary erudition and the breadth and subtlety of his thought are received by every open-minded reader as a rare gift, however much one may disagree with this or that aspect of his philosophical orientation or with any of his apparent conclusions. "Chicago Days" shows that Rosen's praise of and gratitude to Strauss could not be more complete, nor could the respect extended to the best work of Strauss's other students be more just. But Rosen repaid Strauss by himself doing "what is necessary to carry out his deepest teaching: live the life of a philosopher," which of necessity included thinking through Strauss's teachings for himself. Given both the understandable loyalty and the often uncomprehending controversy that Strauss's legacy evokes, Rosen's praise and critique have inevitably attracted both friendly and hostile fire, both more and less well-informed.⁸

Strauss, in common with other powerful thinkers of his time, saw that typically modern societies and states exhibit tensions within their intellectual framework that ought to constitute a crisis for communities founded on Enlightenment or rational principles. Modern liberal democracies can claim "ever broadening freedom and humanitarianism" but they face at least two possible objections: first, that despite or rather because of their complete reliance, practically and theoretically, on the instrumental or "value-free" modern sciences, they could not rationally defend their ends or their way of life or their own attachment to reason; and second, that they cultivate not the peaks of individual and communal achievement but the mediocre collectivity satirized by Nietzsche as "the last man."⁹ In distinction from many of the most influential thinkers of the twentieth century, Strauss neither believed that human life could be fully comprehended by the methods of modern science, nor was he tempted to follow Nietzsche and Heidegger and abandon reason as the standard by which to judge that life.¹⁰

Strauss regularly confined his writings to the dual theme of political philosophy or the asking of the questions, What is human excellence and happiness? and What is the best regime? This decision seems to issue from his conclusion that the fundamental questions could be addressed only within the human sciences, or that it is

only there that one cannot avoid raising the questions of better and worse that militate against the scientific or rationalizing temptation to homogenize human nature.¹¹ One of the marks of Strauss's studies was the great care with which he read so many of the most important texts that have been handed down to us; his illumination of their rhetorical intention and structure has the capacity to reproduce in the reader the excitement of intellectual discovery intended by his great originals. His demonstration that authors of other ages were at least as aware as we are of the fundamental human problems by itself goes some way towards falsifying the historicist thesis that all thought is the child of its time. This was also, of course, one of the motivations for Strauss's revelation of the tradition of exoteric writing.

Rosen shares with Strauss the perception that we live in an age dominated by nihilistic thought, although neither could be remotely described as reactionary. They do not repudiate any genuine benefits or justice given or promised by modern society, but seek to revive the standards by which such goods could reasonably be known.

Rosen's departure from Strauss issued from his dissatisfaction with the latter's characterization of philosophy as the ascent from opinion through *erōs*.¹² Rosen agrees that we must begin with opinion, or with the most attentive examination of everyday experience and speech, for there can be no other ground for our judging of the validity of any philosophical hypothesis or scientific theory. He also agrees with the necessity of an understanding of human nature and its natural fulfillments and desires, but an understanding that comprehends poetic and philosophic thought; in short, an understanding of *erōs* as Plato describes it and not a reductive account of human desire. However, Rosen also contends that the philosopher must attempt to demonstrate the intelligible structure of the whole, or the grounds of the difference between rational and irrational speech. Without this engagement in "metaphysics" or the elaboration of first principles, the appeal to the opinions of thinkers, ordinary or great, of a particular epoch is insufficient to show the trans-historical nature of philosophy. This is to say the same as that the philosopher must "give an account" in the classical sense

of constructing a world within which philosophy is possible. Since it is a world in which philosophy and not wisdom is possible it is self-consciously a construction or picture, having the status of an image that reflects the structure of image and original, because in principle it cannot bring forth the original. This is the same structure as that of the three central images in Plato's *Republic*. Both the affirmation of the intelligibility of the principles of speech and deed and the simultaneous denial that we can step outside of our finite perspectives upon them are exemplified by a speech that itself has the status of an image reflecting those principles, for which Plato's words were *eidos* and *idea*. The justification of a qualified version of the Platonic forms, and the related topics of intuition or of the openness of the *psychē*, became central themes in Rosen's books on Plato, Hegel, Nietzsche, and Heidegger, on analytical philosophy, on the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns, and on the quarrel between poetry and philosophy. Rosen's exhibition of his own meditations upon the whole constituting, and constituted by, the ordinary experience from within which the first things become accessible, and his confrontation with the major alternative views, is a central theme of two later works, *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language* and *The Elusiveness of the Ordinary*.

The second chapter of this volume, "Straussian Hermeneutics," is a valuable extended essay on Strauss's overall orientation and his rhetorical strategy that adds significantly not just to Rosen's work on his teacher but to the wider literature on the relations between philosophy, hermeneutics, and politics. Among Rosen's reservations about Strauss's teaching is that, if this is a time of nihilism then exoteric caution about the dangers of philosophy is both unnecessary and may be positively harmful, if it implies that a proper statement of the philosophical analysis of religion and politics cannot be achieved. Rosen obviously does not suggest that philosophy can have a pellucid, non-rhetorical public appearance, and he accepts Strauss's description of the historical facts of esotericism as "almost trivially true." He argues, however, that our circumstances require us either to conceal this history completely or to employ the rhetoric of frankness, including frankness about esotericism. In this

perspective, to adopt the rhetorical stance of ancient or medieval thinkers would be to succumb to historicism in the very attempt to overcome it.

Rosen sets his response to Strauss's thought in the broadest possible context of the fundamental dialectic between reason and will in the history of thought. This formulation will remind the reader of Strauss's formulation for his central concern, the theologico-political problem, which is an inflection of this dialectic.¹³ The density of this essay defies summary, but two themes may be introduced here. Rosen wishes, on the one hand, to defend the classical understanding that, strictly speaking, there is no hermeneutical problem. The ambiguity of a writing can only be resolved within the reader's experience, that is, on the basis of the intelligibility of our own speech and ordinary experience; in principle it cannot be resolved on the basis of another writing without leading to a *reductio ad infinitum*. This argument tells first against the followers of Heidegger who assert that the interpretation of a work that attempts to discern the author's intention unwittingly relies upon a metaphysics of presence. Rosen argues that the intelligibility of books derives not from any supposed presence or transparency of the beings, which in classical thought are precisely what are absent to, if reflected in speech and writing; rather, their intelligibility arises from the presence of one intelligence or soul to another conveyed through writing, or speech at second hand. The argument is also intended to tell against the suggestion found in Strauss's works, or at least in a certain reading of his works, that the esotericism of Plato's dialogues functions as a "cryptogram"; that is, that the surface of the dialogues conceal a fully coherent or systematic discursive teaching. Rosen raises two objections to this view: first, it contradicts Strauss's agreement that the soul is "prophetic" or has a presentiment of the eternal truth that cannot be captured in *logos*; and second, if the truth can be seen in the surface of our everyday experience, then it cannot also be accurately mirrored by an infinitely elusive and esoteric writing. The proper inference from the apprehension of things we have in ordinary experience is that the everyday is, in a sense, the exoteric teaching of nature,

which allows both for our perspectival apprehension of the truth and for the variety of false opinions.

In the course of this essay Rosen advances a most convincing explanation for the paradox that Strauss's moderate and friendly critique of the Enlightenment, and his corresponding defense of classical liberalism, has met such overheated academic opposition, not to mention unthinking hatred, whereas Nietzsche's excoriation of the theory and practice of democracy on every level, not to mention every page, is received with the academic equivalent of a carpet of palm fronds, where it is not propagated unawares. This contrasting treatment issues from Nietzsche's appeal to the priority of the will and imagination, that is, to the elements of "the radical or political substratum of the Enlightenment" that he is apparently rejecting, where Strauss's appeal to the practical moderation that issues from an understanding of the defining limits of our nature is experienced by critics as an unwelcome restriction upon our freedom. The essay concludes with a frank discussion of the relation between philosophy and political thought (of which this misunderstanding is a telling example), a discussion that includes a bracing dissection of the relation between the thought and the political misdeeds of Kojève and Heidegger. This is the light in which Rosen makes his proposal for modifying Strauss's "complex and honorable goal."

Another aspect of Rosen's critique of Strauss is developed in Chapter Thirteen, "Leo Strauss and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns." Rosen neatly turns on its head the early modern denigration of poetry by pointing out that the new founding of science upon a mathematical paradigm is accompanied if not accomplished by the assignment of a new, practical end for philosophy. But philosophy is then directed by an end that is in principle non-mathematical, and so an end that is dependent upon the passions and that originates in the imagination. Thus the early moderns effectively make the intellect dependent upon the will and so make philosophy a species of poetry. Rosen suggests that Strauss's occasional statements of the irreconcilable demands of philosophy and religion, however propaedeutic, would seem to

imply that philosophy itself rests not only on a natural desire for understanding but on an act of the will.

If philosophy is to be possible then the intellect must have priority over the will, or there must be some proportion between the knowing soul and the whole of which it is a part. Chapters Three and Four investigate this question in the words attributed to Thales and Parmenides, respectively. Our ability to take the pre-Socratics seriously is hampered by the praise conventionally lavished upon them for taking one or two steps out of myth and into logical or empirical primitivism. This faint praise is an expression of the prejudice that there has been progress in the fundamentals of philosophy and not just in the empirical sciences, a conviction secured with the usual planted evidence. In contrast with this whole approach, Rosen experiments with the possibility that we can recognize philosophy in the reported testimony and fragments of Thales and Parmenides. If philosophy is possible then its beginning cannot be historical in the sense that it emerged gradually from un-philosophical thought, and so could be identified by historical research; rather, it could only be recognized if philosophy is a permanent human possibility and if we ourselves philosophize. Rosen uncovers in what we have of their words a possible outline of the necessary metaphysical structure of the self and the whole that would justify discerning the origin of philosophy in their thought.

In these essays, Rosen seems to take several steps in the direction of Hegel in order to explain Thales and Parmenides. In any case, the plausibility of these interpretations seems to affirm the Socratic suspicion that the pre-Socratics are talking about the accomplishment not of philosophy but of wisdom.¹⁴ A central object of Rosen's philosophical study has been Plato's demonstration of the links between what is first for us and what is first in itself, or of the emergence of philosophy from ordinary experience. Plato's choice of the dialogue form as the medium of the teaching of philosophy would seem to be a clear reflection of that thesis, but the ultimate significance of this choice proves most elusive. This difficulty is illustrated in Chapter Eight, a review essay that weighs three texts by representatives of the predominant modes of Plato scholarship, which we

might conveniently label the analytical, continental, and dialogical. The first is represented by the inconsistent and woodenheaded reaction in the face of the dialogue form of Gregory Vlastos, the second by Hans-Georg Gadamer, and the last by Seth Benardete. Of course, Benardete's work defies any collective label, just as it transcends most other commentaries on classical thought in general and on Plato in particular. However, this choice is illustrative of the general truth that once we take notice of the dialogue form it becomes all the more difficult to garner any scholarly consensus not just as to what Plato teaches but as to what he thought the philosophical questions are. Throwing us back on our own devices is presumably one of Plato's intended tactics.

There is now an array of interpretations of Plato that claim orientation by the dialogue form, a development in the English-speaking scholarship due to the fundamental shift in Plato studies wrought by the commentaries and translations of Strauss, his friend Jacob Klein, Rosen, Benardete, and of Allan Bloom, and others.¹⁵ These works lent both scope and concentration to the never extinguished awareness of the importance of Socratic irony and of the dramatic character of Plato's works. One would not say that citation of the originators of this development by many of the scholars who have benefited from it has been excessive. When credit is awarded where it is due, Rosen rightly receives a distinguished part of it for the reason mentioned above and for his analysis of the deficiencies of the other typical approaches and their origins.

It happens that Rosen concludes his review of Benardete's book with the suggestion that we are left in need of a further discussion of Socrates' attachment to Alcibiades. He himself contributes to the fulfillment of this need in Chapter Five, "Socrates and Alcibiades." This paper is intended as an investigation into how to read a Platonic dialogue, conducted through an examination of Socrates' relations with Alcibiades and with Protagoras. As the frame of the *Protagoras* intimates, Socrates, Alcibiades, and Protagoras form an "erotic triangle" between the various modifications of *erōs* whose poles are Socrates' love of wisdom and Alcibiades' love of honor. The theme of the essay is the instability of spiritedness or the love of

honor as a mean between the rule of the intellect and the rule of the desires. Rosen interprets Socrates' attempt to educate Alcibiades as a poetic reconstruction and psychological analysis of Plato's failed experiment in Syracuse. The essay raises the question whether the revolutionary implications of philosophy mean that Socrates is less capable than Protagoras of a successful accommodation to politics. This question leads Rosen to raise in turn "the peculiarly uncomfortable but philosophically necessary question whether philosophy may not be politically more dangerous, even more destructive, than sophistry."

This question shows the intimate relation between the question of whether there is a human nature to the question of the extent to which the conventional or lawful can be a reflection of the natural; equivalently, in what manner and degree may the philosopher *qua* philosopher be politically visible? Rosen takes up this question in the Chapter Six, "Philosophy and Poetry in Plato." Plato's Socrates seems initially to fight his corner in the quarrel between philosophy and poetry by dismissing imitative poetry from the so-called beautiful city on the grounds that it caters to pleasure and ignores the truth. This dismissal is qualified by Socrates' citations of poets as authorities over experiences of the human soul, and undercut by his description of his own construction of the city in speech as poetic or productive, a form of philosophical music. This essay takes us deeper into the relation between poetry and philosophy in Plato, showing us that Plato does not and cannot exclude poetry from philosophical politics precisely because politics is expressive of the constructive or poetic element of human nature.

Rosen contends that the view that human nature is completely fixed is as absurd as the view that it is completely open. Yet, if there can be a human nature only if it is "partly open," that means that it is partly divided against itself. "Art" (*technē, nomos*) is required to heal or perfect the human soul. This viewpoint allows Rosen to develop a decisive aspect of the contrast between Plato and Aristotle which has been important in previous of his works. Aristotle's designation of man as the political animal seems to imply that the human virtues are a natural fulfillment, albeit one effected by law and habit,

in the specific sense that they may be perfected without philosophy. Rosen links this suggestion to the Aristotelian tripartition of knowledge into the theoretical, practical, and productive, which implies the independence of the practical virtues from production and philosophical excellence. Even if, as Rosen here speculates and as is sometimes suggested, this interpretation of the teaching that man is the political animal is exoteric, Rosen proposes that to make explicit the complex interrelations between the *Ethics* and the *Metaphysics* is still to Platonize Aristotle. By contrast, Plato's Socrates and Eleatic Stranger distinguish between theory and "practico-production," which reflects the thesis of the unity of theory and practice, a unity one might equally infer from the notion of philosopher kings, or of the derogation of Aristotelian ethical virtue as demotic virtue.

On the one hand, the Platonic notions of the ideas and of dialectic play a role in the dialogues that may be described as conservative, in the philosophical rather than a narrowly political sense, for their role in preserving the visibility of the principles of thought and action against the vicissitudes of time. On the other hand, the paradigm of the philosopher-kings in the *Republic* is "the most revolutionary single step in the history of our race." Rosen sees the history of political philosophy since as a dialectical interplay between these poles, one in which the equilibrium between discovery and invention in the Platonic dialogues is rarely maintained. Rosen's defense of the possibility of philosophy requires him to show that the admittedly constructed aspects of human life allow for or depend upon theory in the classical sense, that is, as *theoria* or intellection of the ideas or principles of things. This task has been requisite to the defense of philosophy ever since the character of the discovery of nature by the first philosophers seemed to encourage the conclusion that the principles governing specifically human as opposed to natural beings were merely conventional. Such a defense is all the more necessary in our time when the conceptual, cultural, historical, "psychological," illusory, or, in sum, the constructed character of human life or of reality itself has much broader intellectual acceptance, since such acceptance devolves from a much more politically authoritative science that seems to endorse the same conclusion. Three chapters

undertake the three most necessary parts of this defense: Chapter Six with a view to the constructed character of political life; Chapter Twelve, "The Production of Ideas," in view of the role of construction in thinking itself; and finally, Chapter Fifteen, "*Technē* and the Origins of Modernity," fulfils the suggestion at the end of Chapter Six that it was the constructive element in philosophy that led the progenitors of the modern scientific and political revolution to invoke Plato as their authority in their opposition to Aristotle.

Chapter Twelve is the last of the six Gilson lectures which Rosen delivered in November and December 2003, as the Etienne Gilson Lecturer at the Institut Catholique in Paris. The lectures as a whole treat Heidegger's reading of Plato, controverting in particular Heidegger's thesis that Plato possesses or is possessed by a productive metaphysics; that is, that the ideas are temporal perspectives or factitious paradigms masquerading as the eternal beings. In this lecture Rosen departs from Heidegger's specific contentions to consider more broadly the role of construction in philosophy or thought itself in Plato's work and to examine whether a modified version of the traditional axioms of Platonism is defensible. This examination is in general a defense of a central thesis of classical philosophy, that we don't know only what we make, or that we have a pre-technical or pre-discursive understanding of things or of the beings. Three Platonic axioms are defended: first, the assumption of the definiteness of beings or the principle that to be is to be something of a certain kind; second, that the kind or idea of a thing is in some sense separate from the individuals of that kind; and third, that there cannot be knowledge, in the precise sense of the grasping of what is necessarily or eternally true, of the changing particulars of the domain of genesis. Part of Rosen's modification of what is often accepted as Platonism is the rejection of the model of original and image for the relationship of thing and Idea. These axioms are considered in the only way that philosophical axioms may be "worthy of being held," not as *a priori* or stipulated categories, laws, or rules, but as incorrigible inferences from our ordinary experience.

Chapter Fifteen begins from the controversy as to whether the work of early modern scientists and philosophers such as Galileo

and Descartes issued primarily from a commitment to a geometrical cosmology or to solving practical mechanical problems. The essay proposes that this formulation of the question is inadequate to account for the alignment of the early moderns with Plato and against Aristotle, and that Plato decisively influenced their commitment to a mathematical ontology not as a geometrical cosmologist but because of his poetic or constructivist side. But if there is to be philosophy or science then the context of what is made depends on what is not made but seen, and it is here of course that the great difference between the early moderns and Plato is exposed.

The most powerful if often unconscious form of the denial of the possibility of the philosophy seems to be the simple corollary of taking modern natural science as the authority for knowledge: if knowledge is concerned only with what may fall under natural laws, in the modern sense, than clearly everything of human significance is invention rather than discovery. These three essays together mount a defense of the classical hypothesis that the role of art or construction in political and philosophical life is to complete nature not create it. They set out the reasons for the diminished awareness of that notion, and they indicate the path for the reclamation of Plato's version of this hypothesis.

By contrast, it appears that Aristotle's tripartition of the theoretical sciences diminishes the role of poetry in politics as in thought, just as it implies that genuine knowledge of first principles is possible. In Chapter Seven, "*Dynamis*, *Energeia* and the Megarians," Rosen develops an *aporia* in Aristotle's teachings concerning predication, essence, and intuition. This problem turns on the fact that intuition is necessary to grasp anything as what it is, but the unity which is intuited does not have the structure of subject and predicate. Rosen's purpose is to show that this *aporia* affects Aristotle's teaching concerning potentiality and actuality, such that it nullifies his criticism of the Megarians, whose thesis is that there is no real distinction between potentiality and actuality. One way to understand the significance of this essay is to note the importance for most modern philosophers and for modern science of the denial that there is a genuine difference between actuality and potentiality, a denial

corresponding to the teaching that causation may be reduced to the material and efficient (in their late forms).¹⁶ The essay argues that the problems intrinsic to the doctrine of predication are manifest in contemporary philosophy, as may be shown by the attempt of modal logic to reintroduce the notion of potentiality.

This critique of Aristotle is one of the elements of Chapter Nine, "Is Metaphysics Possible?" Rosen argues that the charge that Plato is the progenitor of metaphysics is better directed at Aristotle, and in particular at his ambiguous distinction between knowledge of first principles or causes and scientific or demonstrative knowledge of the distinct species of beings. This is not to say that the charges are vindicated, however much it seems that Aristotle is responsible for the non-Aristotelian view of metaphysics—in distinction from the Aristotelian "first philosophy"—as the demonstrative knowledge of first principles expressed in predicative discourse. Acceptance of the latter notion ultimately leads to Hegel or to Heidegger, that is, to the belief that a discursive science of the whole is possible or that the beings arise in our thinking of them from an unintelligible source. This rejection of intellectual intuition is a repudiation of the given or of everyday experience and its replacement by theoretical construction, whether in the form of phenomenological or linguistic historicism. Rosen suggests that, despite the fact that this repudiation of the given was mistakenly thought to be a rejection of metaphysics as Platonism, the present chaotic diversity of metaphysical and epistemological programs may actually allow us to appreciate the different forms of knowing, including intuition, given to us in experience, and he concludes with a justification of noetic perception modeled on Plato's account. His answer to the essay's titular questions is that, since all discursive understanding is rooted in pre-discursive apprehension, or since demonstrative metaphysics is necessarily rooted in the silence of intuition, "[m]etaphysics is possible precisely because *it is not actual*."

Chapters Ten and Eleven elaborate Rosen's interpretation of Plato in light of his critique of the repudiation of the given character of ordinary experience in modern philosophy. In Chapter Ten, "Socrates' Dream," the *Theaetetus* is read as an extended *reductio*

of the attempt to define philosophy by analytical thinking. Where Socrates understands such an intention as a dream, analytical philosophy intends it seriously, but "[i]f thinking is analyzing then significance cannot be an end or intention" with obvious results for the significance of the activity of analysis. Rosen shows how the analytical approach to philosophy, represented here by Frege, Wittgenstein, and Russell, among others, replaces the question of being in Greek thought with the function of existence. This replacement allows for a mathematically derived analysis of our statements about things, but cannot account for the unity or wholeness of the things we experience and so cannot even explain existence, which is derivative upon the apprehension of the being or *ousia* of whatever exists.

Chapter Eleven, "Return to the Origin: Reflections on Plato and Contemporary Philosophy," is a concise study of the most important philosophical renderings of the pre-philosophical origin or the context of human life from which philosophy emerges and from which it derives its significance. That origin has variously been called, among other things, the world, the cosmos, or the whole. For Plato, our thinking of the whole is a poetic activity that makes only an image of the whole, but an image without which there would be no whole for us because the whole is accessible to us only in our thinking it. We do not make the ideas, natures, or beings, but to think the whole in which we think the ideas requires a constructive or poetic activity. The whole is *doxa*. This Platonic depiction of the whole is compared with that of Kant, who replaces the ideas by rules and concepts, and then more briefly with that of Husserl, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein, whose efforts to complete or to deny the possibility of a philosophical account of life are variations upon elements of the Kantian inheritance. The former impulse turns life into an object of conceptual investigation, which means the investigator is excluded from the inquiry, one that cannot then comprehend the soul and so understand or justify philosophy or science itself. The latter impulse leaves us without a stable criterion for thought or *phronēsis*, that is, with historicism of one variety or another. Following Strauss, it is often said that philosophy can be defended as a way of life rather than as a doctrine. This is true, but that defense must

include the depiction of the whole within which that way of life is sensible. Astute readers of Plato frequently dispute the relevance of imputing to him an epistemology, or a philosophy of mind, or a disjunction between ethics and metaphysics, and so forth. But this essay provides us with a rare elaboration of the philosophical account needed to demonstrate that Plato's thought can successfully be appropriated and brought into dialogue with the peaks of modern thought in order to illuminate the fundamental questions.

Chapter Fourteen, "An Introduction to the *Philebus*," explicates and interprets in considerable detail the first pages of one of Plato's most difficult dialogues. The difficulty stems chiefly from the disparity or disconnection between the practical question of the good life or happiness and the abstruse elaborations of eidetic analysis. The *Philebus* is one of the dialogues that Rosen has taught most frequently, and parts of his interpretation of the dialogue have formed the pivot of some of his previously published writings. This chapter shows why that has been the case. In analyzing the explicit questions and responses of text, the underlying issues, and the deeper problematic motivating them both, Rosen shows his ability to relate dramatic detail to philosophical dialectic without reducing the one to the other.

In the sixteenth and final chapter, "Platonic Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of A Platonic Dialogue," Rosen argues against both the mathematization of Plato by those who interpret the dialogues according to recent versions of logic, and against the Derridean deconstruction of the priority of speech over writing to which Plato supposedly adheres because of his subscription to a metaphysics of presence. Rosen contends instead that Plato exhibits an "intentional self-deconstruction," or a discourse that depicts "the absence of an epistemic speech about Being." Both the analysts and Derrida, misled by their devotion to a discursive system as the model of knowledge, fail to see the necessary incompleteness of speech about the forms. Rosen designates the analysts "esotericists" because they ignore the dialogue form and large parts of the text in order to disinter certain propositions that appear to admit the discovery of Plato as a proto-analyst. (The irony of this designation

will amuse anyone familiar with the analysts' reaction to the presentation of evidence from the history of esotericism.) In any event, it is a consequence of this shared model of knowledge that the analysts cannot defend their undertaking against the relativistic attacks of Derrida, who in turn cannot preserve himself from the objection that, since on his own hypothesis speech has no ground in pre-discursive sense, his speech is nonsense. Plato's distinction between philosophy and poetry is preserved from relativism by the priority he gives to seeing over making. The deepest sense in which Plato's text is exoteric—or subject to self-deconstruction—is as an exercise in "erotic hermeneutics," that is, in evoking and clarifying insight by means of discourse. Plato's intention is thus primarily "theoretical," in the classical sense of that term, and this introduction will close with a word about Rosen's theoretical intentions that may be helpful to some readers.

Stanley Rosen has received recognition from poets, novelists, psychologists, political scientists, students of philosophy, and many others, not only as one of the best interpreters in our time of the great philosophers but as a genuine philosopher in his own right with his own distinctive contribution to make to the tradition. Of course, this recognition accumulates according to the fitful patterns of philosophical immortalization, yet sheer weight of merit has brought Rosen's entirely unconventional achievement many honors within the discipline of philosophy itself. However, to understand that achievement better, I think it more useful to dwell briefly upon the argument made by Alasdair MacIntyre, a prominent figure in recent political philosophy, that the reasons underlying the "undeniable truth" that Rosen's work "has not received the attention that it deserves," are of unusual interest.¹⁷ MacIntyre plausibly explains that academic recognition depends upon orientating one's work by the accepted figures, standpoints, and questions, and their accepted interpretations, whereas Rosen's work makes it impossible for the reader to continue in such conventional lines of inquiry. Neglect of his work is thus an attempt "to avoid distraction and disturbance."¹⁸ Yet, and this is the interesting point, MacIntyre himself expresses more sympathy with "another aspect

of the resistance to acknowledging Rosen's insights." Rosen's analyses of some apparently well understood issue or text show "by a detailed exegesis of relevant texts conducted with insight and imagination that things are a good deal more complex than we had taken them to be"; yet, at every emendation of one's point of view, Rosen's arguments bring to light further overlooked complexities, until finally, MacIntyre avers, "we have just too many issues on our hands at once" and for this reason "a refusal to accompany Rosen to this point may arise at least in part from a sense that sometimes some fundamental issue may be in danger of being obscured."¹⁹

What may be obscured, one might suggest, is the awareness that one has the final answer to some basic question necessary to action in good conscience. This is most interesting because one might then conclude that MacIntyre's sympathy with this objection stems from a primary concern for the practical.²⁰ To address this concern, it must first be said that, in an age whose political institutions and human self-understanding largely derive from past philosophical decisions, investigation of those now disputed philosophical positions is amongst our most urgent practical needs. Not to mention that Rosen's appropriation of the teaching of the classical philosophers is founded in their observation that to be human is in some sense to be philosophical. This means that the defense of philosophy in its highest sense or of the perfection of human nature is also our best means to a non-reductive understanding of what makes us all human. But, ultimately, Rosen's defense of the intelligibility of practice is also his defense of the priority of theory.²¹ Rosen's theoretical intentions make his works a continuous provocation, not merely in the sense that they present a standing challenge to prevailing intellectual currents, but more deeply in the sense that they intend to call forth the reader's insight into the fundamental matters. Aristotle *Platōnizei*, describes the experience of being thus provoked to seeing the unchanging beings or principles, which he thus calls the eternal or divine things, as follows: "even if we only attain a slight grasp of them, nevertheless on account of their worth this is more pleasant than knowing everything on the ordinary level (*par' hēmīn*), just as a partial,

chance glimpse of those we love (*erōmenōn*) is more pleasant than looking upon many other great things with complete precision."²²

Notes

- 1 E.g., *Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a12.
- 2 For insightful introductions to Rosen's work, see Robert Pippin's Foreword to the Second Edition of *Hermeneutics as Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) and Michael Allan Gillespie's Foreword to the Second Edition of *The Mask of Enlightenment: Nietzsche's Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004).
- 3 *Plato's Symposium* was first published in 1968 (second edition, 1987) by Yale University Press, and is reprinted by St. Augustine's Press (South Bend, Ind.: 1999). *Nihilism: A Philosophical Essay* was first published in 1969 by Yale University Press, and is now reprinted with the English version of the interesting "Preface to the Portuguese Translation," by St. Augustine's Press (South Bend, Ind.: 2000).
- 4 "Kojève's Paris: A Memoir," is Chapter Fifteen of *Metaphysics in Ordinary Language* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999; Reprint: South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2004).
- 5 The conference was held in November 2002. In the opening remarks of his course on Plato's *Philebus* at Boston University in Fall term of 2002, Rosen dedicated the course to the memory of David Grene.
- 6 *Nihilism*, p. 172.
- 7 This passage from *Nihilism* is also cited in an almost lyric or perhaps dithyrambic essay on "Stanley Rosen as Educator," by Nalin Ranasinghe in *Logos and Eros: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe (South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2006), pp. 1–12. If I may be granted this personal remark, through my years as a graduate student and in the years since, I never left Rosen's class, office, home, or reading group without feeling inspired about philosophy as the highest human prospect.
- 8 Perhaps the central issue has emerged from the attention given to Rosen's claim that in its roots Strauss's thought approaches that of Kant or even Nietzsche (*Hermeneutics and Politics*, p. 125). This claim is clearly intended as a reflection on the difficulties that Rosen raises concerning Strauss's not providing a persuasive account of the Platonic Ideas or of the intelligible structure that grounds the possibility of philosophy (cf., *ibid.*, especially pp. 121–3, 127–9). However, several evidently serious students of Strauss or of his work seem to have mistaken this objection for a claim that Strauss was a Nietzschean by intention, which would mean that Rosen was making a sophisticated version of an accusation occasionally advanced in essentially illiterate journalism (the exceptions to this rule are the literate treatments of this topic by Laurence Lampert, which require a better response than can be given here; for a beginning, see the article cited at the end of this

note). In a recent article, "Stanley Rosen's Critique of Leo Strauss" (*The Review of Metaphysics*, 63, 2010, pp. 615–42) Alexander Duff honorably undertakes to correct this misreading of Rosen, but unfortunately appears to submerge philosophical disagreement into the tactics of esotericism (e.g., pp. 617, 640), which leads in turn to some very dubious formulations of their respective philosophical positions: Rosen becomes emphatically a modern who gives priority to the individual over the kind, and who takes philosophy to be freedom from nature and convention; Strauss becomes emphatically an ancient whose respect for opinion as the surface of things leads him to assert that "opinion...and politics are natural" from which it follows that there is a continuity of opinion in the ancient, medieval, and modern epochs (641). These suggestions cannot be sustained. For an alternative view, see my "Leo Strauss and Stanley Rosen on the Possibility of Philosophy" (forthcoming).

- 9 See, for example, *Liberalism Ancient and Modern* (1968; Reprint: Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995), p. 203.
- 10 Cf. "Philosophy as Rigorous Science and Political Philosophy," Chapter One in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1983), pp. 29–37.
- 11 Compare *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), p. 8, with *What is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959), pp. 38–40 and 90.
- 12 See, e.g., *What is Political Philosophy*, pp. 29–32 and 40.
- 13 See the "Preface to *Hobbes Politische Wissenschaft*," added to the 1965 German edition of the book first published in English as *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes*; this Preface is available in an English translation by D. L. Maletz in *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 8 (1979–80), pp. 1–3, and in Leo Strauss, *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. K. H. Green (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 453–4.
- 14 The decisive example might be Socrates' criticism of the "wise causes" posited by his predecessors in his "second sailing in search of cause" (*Phaedo* 100b9–10, 99c8–d2; cf. 96a6–7, in Plato, *Opera*, vol. 1, ed. E. A. Duke, et al., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).
- 15 The mainstream neglect of Jacob Klein's philosophical achievement is going to become even more difficult to maintain with the publication of the deft, politic, and helpful commentary on his chief text by Burt Hopkins, *The Origin of the Logic of Symbolic Mathematics: Edmund Husserl and Jacob Klein* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 2011).
- 16 For example, see Bacon, *New Organon*, Book One, Aphorisms LXV and LXVI and Book Two, Aphorisms I–V; translation by F. H. Anderson, Indianapolis, Ind.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1960, pp. 62–65, 121–126; and Descartes, *Meditations* IV (A–T VII, 55–6) and VI (A–T VII, 80–5); translation in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. 2, tr. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff, and D. Murdoch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 1984, pp. 39, 56–59.

- 17 "The Transformations of Enlightenment: Plato, Rosen, and the Postmodern," in *Logos and Eros: Essays Honoring Stanley Rosen*, ed. Nalin Ranasinghe (St. Augustine's Press, 2006), pp. 13–26 at p. 13.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 A concern evident, in this case, in MacIntyre's hope that *phronēsis* and *nomos* might be brought into agreement as they might seem to be in the early books of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* or in Aquinas: see "The Transformations of the Enlightenment," pp. 22 ff. Rosen does not deny this but insists that *phronēsis* of a kind is needed in every aspect of life and so in the application of the *nomoi* (cf. *ibid.*, p. 25); but this no more assimilates *phronēsis* to natural law than it assimilates the requirements of politics with those of philosophical discourse.
- 21 Consider, e.g., *Nihilism*, p. 207 ff.
- 22 *Parts of Animals* I.5, 644b32–645a1, ed. A. L. Peck (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1961), my translation.

CHAPTER ONE
Chicago Days

I

I first met Leo Strauss as a nineteen year old student in the College of the University of Chicago in the Spring of 1949. This was the epoch of the presidency of Robert Maynard Hutchins, and the University was at the height of its glory. The College was at that time famous for the eccentricity and precociousness of many of its students, as well as because of an idiosyncratic program that permitted entering students to take examinations on the basis of which they were assigned course requirements. It was therefore possible to graduate in less than a month of residence. Apparently this was accomplished by the graduate of a Swiss private lycée some years after my departure. In 1949, the record was one year, and this was matched by eighteen members of my class, including Seth Benardete and myself. Another peculiarity of the College was that one could enter at any age, and there were a number of virtual children among my class-mates, in at least one case as young as thirteen. I should add that I arrived in 1948, relatively speaking an old man. I had been admitted to the College following graduation from high school in 1947, but chose to live in New York for a semester under the mistaken impression that I was a burgeoning novelist.

By the time I arrived in Chicago, my vocation had shifted from fiction to poetry. If I am not mistaken, I am the only one of Strauss's long-term students who came to him from poetry. I was also virtually uninterested in politics, unlike the majority of Strauss's students. In addition, I was an avowed metaphysician, who had elaborated a philosophical position, partly influenced by T. S. Eliot, one of whose main tenets was that philosophy and poetry are two different languages about the same world. There was for me no quarrel between philosophy and poetry, as there was (albeit in a subtle form) for Strauss, who followed Plato. In addition to these

intellectual deficiencies, I was undisciplined in the academic sense, and spent most of my time writing poetry, with some professional success and with reasonable hopes for future progress as a poet. High on my list of things that I had no intention of doing was to become a professor of philosophy. To my adolescent vision, being a philosopher and a professor were incompatible, and besides, I regarded myself as already a philosopher.

I had a number of unusual classmates during my year in the College. Perhaps the most interesting of my closest friends was the aforementioned Seth Benardete. Benardete went on to become Strauss's favorite student, and he stands out in my memory as a spirit of genuine distinction and, even at that early age, of rare scholarship. At the time my friends and I assumed that Benardete would go on to a distinguished career as a classical philologist, as in a sense he did. But his books are written in so oblique and discontinuous a style that he was widely reviled by the orthodox classical establishment as a madman or charlatan. I began by regarding him as a formidable exotic; today I would suggest that he was in his youth a character, in the best sense of the term, out of an academic novel by Evelyn Waugh or Anthony Powell. I remember vividly to this day a long conversation we had one night in his dormitory rooms during which Benardete informed me that he regarded it as immoral to love a human being. As a youth with a certain proclivity to this form of immorality, I was incredulous and asked him what we should love. He replied in a magisterial tone: "Greek vases." This struck me as the most sophisticated view I had ever heard, but a view with one flaw: it was nonsensical.

I do not at all wish to say that this anecdote captures the peculiarity of the mature Benardete's publications, but it prepares the way for understanding him. One has to be in the right mood to read Benardete, and if one is in this mood, the texts will yield countless pleasures and illuminations. But the illuminations are, to repeat a word, discontinuous. I once described in a review Benardete's prose style as like a man rowing into the sunshine with muffled oars. Perhaps this simile has been infected by Benardete's own style, but I know from his students that he very much appreciated

the expression. I would like to think of him as a friend, despite the peripeties in our long acquaintance, but I am not certain that "friend" is the right word. We were bound together despite all incompatibilities by the Chicago experience, at the center of which was Leo Strauss. But we were also separated by our differing temperaments. One last anecdote. Benardete once told a mutual friend, someone he had known in high school and who was with us at Chicago, that "you and Mr. Rosen have the two most powerful minds I have ever met; but you are barbarians." Benardete clearly fancied himself as a philosopher of the aristocratic Greek mold who possessed a certain *Heiterkeit* which enabled him to regard the comedy and the tragedy of the modern epoch with amused disdain. I believe that he changed considerably, and for the better, in the second half of his life.

I have permitted myself this deviation in my account of my first meeting with Leo Strauss because for me my friendship with Benardete, whom I saw virtually every day during that first year in Chicago, is a kind of preparation for that meeting. I was a poet, a romantic, and a metaphysician, who had somehow wandered into the lair of the philosopher, the classicist, and the philologist. The atmosphere was redolent of Socratic irony, whereas I represented something quite different. One of the entering examinations in the College required us to write an essay describing our philosophical position. I was told afterwards by a member of the philosophy department that my views were Fichtean, something of which I had never heard. A poet of Fichtean leanings is not in the best position to meet either the young Benardete or the middle-aged Strauss, to say nothing of my distinct deviation from the gentlemanly pretensions of the upper middle class.

I should say at once that Strauss was not at all a snob, and that his conception of decorum was quite reasonable. He was quite right to note in the margin of a first draft of my doctoral dissertation that I liked to *épater le bourgeois*. His astringent follow-up—"I could wish that the entire dissertation had been written in the style of paragraph 2 on page 153"—taught me more about scholarly writing than a dozen texts on hermeneutics. Strauss's own style at its best comes very close to the appropriate blend of the daring of thought

veiled by the web of prudence. He was nevertheless capable of flexibility in the selection of his students, who included myself and Allan Bloom. Many years after I had left Chicago, I encountered an old professor and former colleague of Strauss's who was noted for his elegance and aristocratic tastes. This colleague, a minor Latvian baron, told me that he used to complain to Strauss about my youthful uncouthness, to which Strauss would reply each time: "he's getting better." I owe my education to this willingness to overlook baronial standards.

But I am getting ahead of myself. To come back to the beginning, Strauss had recently arrived in Chicago from New York, and was at that time unknown to the Chicago student community. This may help to explain his charitable reception of so unpromising a potential student. The meeting was arranged by Strauss's step-son, who was also a student in the College. I was at that time preparing an honors paper on a Yiddish writer named Achad Ha'am. Strauss's son told me that his father was an expert on matters of that sort, and asked if I would like to consult him on my paper. I agreed, and set out with the warning that Strauss would probably give me 20 or 30 minutes of his time.

It was a warm Spring evening, and mosquitos filled the humid air. Strauss received me in shirt-sleeves, gesturing with a cigarette holder as if it were a baton. He was a rather short man with a thin, high-pitched voice. His initial demeanor was polite but understandably reserved. He opened the conversation by asking me what I did. I replied "I am a poet." Strauss immediately inquired whether I knew what Plato says about poets. To this I answered something like, "I don't care what Plato says about poetry. I am a poet and I understand it better than he does." This drove Strauss like an uncoiled spring from the easy chair in which he had been sitting, and he paced up and down the room, gesticulating with his cigarette holder, as if trying desperately to bring an unruly orchestra back to orderly response. I will not attempt to duplicate the entire conversation, which lasted for at least two hours, at the end of which he invited me to become his student. I respectfully declined, as I was planning on returning to New York for another go at the literary life.

When I told Strauss that I intended to study at the New School for Social Research, he suggested that I mention his name, which I did, and I was promptly awarded a scholarship. So great was Strauss's reputation at the New School. The experience, however, proved unsatisfactory, and I decided to return to Chicago in 1950 in order to study with Strauss.

In the intervening year, Strauss had attracted the attention of a number of very gifted students, among them Seth Benardete, Hilail Gildin, Victor Gourevitch, Muhsin Mahdi, and Allan Bloom. At or shortly after this time, Richard Rorty began to attend Strauss's lectures, but left to take his doctorate at Yale. Despite his subsequent adventures with analytical philosophy and post-modernism, Rorty had great respect for Strauss and the best members of his circle. I will not attempt to give a complete list of my contemporaries. Let me say only that the students were divided into two main groups: the political scientists and members of the Committee on Social Thought. There were a few members of the philosophy department, including myself (until 1952, when I transferred to the Committee), as well as a steadily increasing selection of visitors from a variety of faculties, both at Chicago and elsewhere, who had been attracted by news of the pied piper of the Midway. Eventually Strauss's audience included several priests, of whom perhaps the most interesting was Ernest Fortin. One could also divide the students in a very general way into those who were primarily interested in American politics and those who were students of classics or one of the major periods in the history of political philosophy. This is of course not a rigid classification, but it is not entirely nebulous. Whereas all of us, I suspect, regarded ourselves as engaged somehow in the pursuit of wisdom, there is a difference between constitutional law, the Federalist papers, or the fact-value distinction in contemporary political science on the one hand, and Plato's analysis of the soul, Ibn Khaldun's philosophy of history, or Rousseau's anthropology on the other.

It is a tribute to Strauss's brilliance as a scholar and a teacher that he could serve to unify a band of investigations as diverse as these, not to mention many others. There were also private reading groups led by Strauss and devoted to topics that he could not

conveniently teach in the political science department, such as Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* or Hegel's *Logic*. For obvious bureaucratic reasons, none of Strauss's students was writing a dissertation on "pure" philosophy in the academic sense of that term. We were officially political scientists, not specialists on causality, ontology, or German Idealism, and of course not in the philosophy of science, epistemology, or the foundations of mathematics, which lay outside Strauss's (and most of our) competence.

Strauss, the great enemy of historicism, was at first sight training historians of political thought and political scientists who were prepared to use that history as a foundation for rethinking the cardinal tenets of their discipline. From this standpoint, he was engaged in a radically re-conceived version of the Heideggerian "destruction" of Western philosophy, with two massive qualifications. First, Strauss was primarily concerned with politics rather than ontology, and second, his archaeological excavations were designed to return us to the thoughts of the heroes of the Western tradition, that is, to the thoughts as these heroes had thought them, and not, as in Heidegger's case, to the ostensibly deeper and unthought thoughts that constituted the authentic *Seinsgeschichte* of Western metaphysics. Both thinkers were engaged in the enterprise of "uncovering" a concealed truth. In the case of Strauss, however, the origin and the paradigm for that truth was Plato, whereas for Heidegger, Plato was the initiator of the radical concealment of truth. Nevertheless, it is true that Strauss was deeply impressed by Heidegger, especially by the Heidegger of the early and middle period. I am certain that Strauss learned much about how to read a Greek text from Heidegger, not to mention what he assimilated of Nietzsche's critique of modernity and nihilism.

Let me add a word about the major difference between Strauss and Heidegger. Heidegger radicalized Nietzsche's critique of Enlightenment by extending it to Plato; his intention was to go behind or above Platonism to another way, a way entirely free of the presumably reified and subjectivist thinking of Western Platonist metaphysics. From this exalted standpoint, the Enlightenment was itself a version of Platonism, and something to be overcome.

Strauss, on the contrary, took us back through the history of philosophy to Plato, not in order to overcome the modern Enlightenment but to find its mistakes and to correct these in the name of a genuine liberalism and freedom of thought. Heidegger has sometimes been called a liberator and Strauss is often denounced for his conservatism. Both judgments are largely nonsense unless they are given careful qualification. Heidegger's conception of radical freedom has nothing to do with Western European liberalism, and for much deeper reasons than his support of the Nazis. Strauss held a number of views (which I do not always share) that seem to be conservative because they are intended to compensate for the exaggerated decline of modern liberalism into nihilism. We should also never forget that the fashions of today do not necessarily provide us with the best criteria for understanding what it is to be a liberal, and that this term has changed its sense in the development of the modern epoch.

My point here is that Strauss was neither a liberal nor a conservative in the contemporary senses of these terms, but a philosopher. His primary concern was with the preservation of philosophy, but he saw that preservation as inseparably dependent in our time upon a society that did not regard nobility and what Nietzsche calls "rank-ordering" as incompatible with freedom. In other words, Strauss understood the tyranny of the left as well as of the right. In the climate of the past fifty years, this balance made him look like a conservative, and to some, a reactionary if not actually a fascist.

I would accept Strauss's characterization of himself as a modern classical liberal. To the extent that this form of liberalism had deteriorated into what we came to call "post-modernism," Strauss of course responded as a conservative. But he was altogether more flexible and more moderate than his close friend, Alexandre Kojève, who accepted the bankruptcy of the West up to the Napoleonic counter-revolution, but who also accepted its purification by his own post-Hegelian version of Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, and Heidegger.

As so often happens with memoirs, I am moving ahead of myself. Let me come back to my earliest impressions of the Strauss circle, and so of the master himself. I arrived in Chicago for my

"second sailing" in the Fall of 1950, as a graduate student in the Department of Philosophy. It soon became evident to me that Strauss transcended the faculty members of the philosophy department in virtually every significant way. The first qualitative difference to be mentioned, and the hardest to describe, is that Strauss was in fact a philosopher who did not obfuscate fundamental issues with elaborate and gratuitous methodological chicanery. Nor was there in him the despicable bullying and dogmatism that was common in the Chicago philosophy department during the reign of Richard McKeon. Finally, the level of scholarship and the breadth of learning that Strauss combined was entirely missing in the philosophy department. Rudolph Carnap was a member of the department when I arrived, but he was soon driven out by McKeon. Of the other senior professors, Charles Hartshorne was by far the best, both as a person and a philosopher, but his interests were very far from my own. Suffice it to say that I was quite unhappy in the philosophy department.

My serious education took place in Strauss's seminars, or during conversations in his office or home. Needless to say, Strauss had no standing in the philosophy department, and I was officially a designated student of Richard McKeon. I began to detach myself from the philosophy department and to spend much time in the Chicago art museum instead of attending philosophy seminars regularly. My "career plans," as students say today, extended no higher than the possibility of becoming a janitor in a junior high school, as I romantically put it to my fiancée. But the serious part of the day was devoted to listening to or speaking with Strauss, and immersing myself in the texts that were being analyzed in his graduate courses. Interestingly enough, my status in the philosophy department improved under this regime, and just when I had decided to shift to the Committee on Social Thought (about which more below), I was praised by the graduate officer for my performance on the Master's qualifying examination and offered financial assistance to begin doctoral study in philosophy.

During the first two years of my study at Chicago, then, I was in a real sense a man without a country, moving back and forth across the frontier with forged papers. One could call this a practical

application of Strauss's understanding of esotericism. And this brings us to a question that has played a puzzling and, to be frank, irritating role in my professional life. It is also one of those aspects of the relation between teacher and student that is most difficult to explain. But it is important to get this right for the sake of the general validity of my portrait of Strauss. Stated crudely, the question is whether I was then (or am now) a "Straussian."

This obnoxious expression has many counterparts among academics; one finds the students of all charismatic teachers being described as "Hegelians," "Marxists," "Wittgensteinians," even "Quineans." Strauss himself liked to quote Nietzsche to the effect that the best thing a student can do for his teacher is to kill him. I will never forget a conversation with Strauss during the last year of my stay at Chicago, when the question of finding a teaching position was being discussed. "Disown me!" Strauss said, smiling hugely and straightening up in his swivel chair to facilitate the punctuation of his remark with the inevitable flourish of his cigarette-holder. By this advice, of course, Strauss did not mean to suggest that I forget or dishonor everything that I had learned from him, but that I do what is necessary to carry out his deepest teaching: live the life of a philosopher.

Let me therefore say at once that there were no "Straussians" among the inner circle of Strauss's best students. There was of course a certain area of agreement about the solidity of Strauss's scholarship; if this had not been so, it would have been folly to study under his supervision. We were all convinced that he was right about the tradition of esoteric writing, and as a corollary, we accepted the need to read serious philosophical works written at least before the French Revolution with a kind of Talmudic eye. Even more important, we felt as a direct force the erotic strength of Strauss's spirit, and we were ourselves "turned around" (to use Socrates' metaphor of the *periagōgē tēs psuchēs*) by that strength in a way that goes beyond inspiration to a re-attunement of the soul and an opening of the eye of the intellect. This is something that does not come from reading books, but only from direct contact with a great teacher.

I am myself an example of the fact that Strauss did not demand unquestioning obedience of his students. I admired him enormously,

and in due course I came to revere him as a rare blessing, without whose training and guidance my life would have been seriously diminished. But on the crucial point, I was not from the outset, nor did I ever become, a "Straussian." I put this word in scare-quotes to indicate that it is a pseudo-term employed by ideologues as an excuse to avoid serious thought, or as a mask for their own ignorance. No one could deny that Strauss had his own views, and that he was not quick to assume that his students knew more or had thought more deeply than he. He was of course correct in both respects. But he always accepted modifications or addenda to his interpretations when the evidence warranted it, and he welcomed competent, or at least sincere and well-argued disagreement.

This is, or should be, obvious. Let me be more precise. I had reservations about Strauss's general political orientation. I am not referring here merely to the question of domestic or contemporary issues, but to the underlying critique of modernity. Except for a short period very early in my studies with Strauss, when I was largely under his spell, I have always leaned toward the moderns in their famous quarrel with the ancients. To the extent that I agreed with Strauss's analysis of the defects of the late-modern world, I also disagreed with him about the appropriateness of the rhetoric he had devised to encourage salutary revisions in, or even the elimination of, those defects. This is to say that I disagreed with him about the tactics to be employed as a politically engaged partisan of philosophy. Stated more abstractly, I found his praise of the ancients and his criticism of the moderns to be equally excessive. I was, therefore, and have remained, a partisan of modernity in a sense deeper than Strauss's conception of classical liberalism.

At this point, I want to interject a relevant observation about Strauss's critique of modernity. Although it is similar to that of Heidegger, it differs from his in a significant respect. There is virtually no emphasis upon the problem of technology, and certainly none in the style of Heideggerian ontology. Instead, we are given numerous criticisms of *methodology*, and in particular of the methodology of modern social science, with its mathematical model of rationality. A critique of methodology is useful, but it does not go to

the heart of the matter. Whatever we may think of it, Heidegger's analysis of *technē* does go to the heart of the matter. I am certainly no Heideggerian, but I have studied him closely for fifty years, and I have been sometimes surprised and always struck by how much Strauss learned from Heidegger, but also at how much he sacrificed of Heideggerian depth. It was of course part of Strauss's deconstruction of Heidegger to move back to the surface as a preparation for the descent into the depths. But one must in fact descend, and this Strauss did not do, whether from conviction or lack of theoretical strength.

Strauss is extremely useful as an antidote against Heidegger's speculative excesses and hermeneutical brutality. But he is not a metaphysician or a poet. This will be regarded by many as a compliment. I shall not debate the point, but simply record it as a difference between Strauss and me that did not at all interfere with my great admiration for him, nor did it diminish all that I have learned from him. He certainly understood this difference, and there is no doubt that he tried to mitigate my own metaphysical and poetical excesses, just as there is no doubt that he was right to do so. What needs to be emphasized is that, whereas my contemporaries and I would not have chosen to study with Strauss if there were not unmistakable evidence of his superior gifts, this choice was never in the best cases a passport to discipleship.

And yet, there was something like a Strauss "school," as is inevitable with charismatic teachers. I have already noted that this phenomenon is not at all uncommon among philosophers, and it is simply bad faith to criticize Strauss because he had many students who admired him enormously. The animus addressed toward Strauss, and in a general sense, "Straussians," had to do with the substance of his teaching, not with his success in attracting students. Strauss was disliked for his critique of the sacred cows of modern social and political science, in particular of Max Weber (whom he highly admired), and because of his rediscovery of the tradition of esotericism, a tradition known to every well-educated scholar until the late nineteenth century, and one that is referred to by thinkers of the rank of Descartes, Leibniz, Condorcet, Hume,

Kant, Lessing, Renan, and Nietzsche, to mention only a few of the most prominent examples of modern times. Too many professors, in a radical distortion of genuine liberalism, condemned Strauss's views on esotericism because they were ignorant of the evidence.

In speaking of Strauss's bad reputation, I have to come back to the question of conservatism. Strauss was widely condemned as a conservative, whereas someone like W. V. Quine, who was at least as conservative as Strauss, was not. I still remember a full-page ad in *The New York Times* shortly before the decisive outbreak of the Watergate scandal, defending then-President Nixon, and signed by a large array of well-known academicians, including Strauss—and Quine. I mention in passing that it was not at the time self-evident that support for Nixon was the equivalent of a declaration of fascism, as is so widely assumed today. I say this as a New Deal Democrat who despised Nixon, but that does not alter the complexity of the situation that was symbolized by the Vietnam War. Be that as it may, I never heard Quine being accused of fascism, nor indeed, was his political position widely discussed in academic circles, although it was certainly known. The key, of course, is that Quine was a "technical" philosopher. One could separate his logical views from his politics, just as, to move to the other end of the political spectrum, one could do in the case of Noam Chomsky's linguistics. In other words, Strauss's reserve with respect to the application of scientific models to the study and interpretation of human life struck his critics as a reactionary repudiation of modernity in a way that was not associated with conservative logicians or, say, physicists.

In sum, Strauss became an immediate target of opprobrium for the liberal academic Establishment. He was challenging the theoretical and methodological soundness of modern social science, which claimed to represent the scientific Enlightenment and the progress of the human race. This challenge, incidentally, was the attenuated or surface version of Heidegger's critique of technicism. In Strauss's version, the challenge was manifestly political, whereas in Heidegger's case, one could claim to speak as an ontologist or seeker after Being, and thereby to be permitted to detach the ontological question from contingent political appropriations.

This is very much like saying that the attempt to reduce the study of human nature to a branch of mathematics and physics, or in today's idiom, neurophysiology and electrical engineering, both has no political implications and is leading us to a radically extended form of Enlightenment—as if that were not itself a political position of utmost force and seriousness. By analogous reasoning, Heidegger's attack on modernity in general and the Enlightenment in particular was associated by his French followers with a doctrine of liberation and creativity, two of the favorite principles of the majority of late-modern thinkers. As one could also put this, Heidegger was assimilated into the left-wing interpretation of Nietzsche. This camouflage could never be sustained in Strauss's case.

One more remark on this topic. Just as Quine was forgiven his conservatism because of his technical orientation in logic, so Heidegger was often forgiven his obnoxious political views on the grounds that he was an ontologist or "thinker" and so naive in practical affairs. Some of his students went so far as to blame Heidegger's politics on the influence of his wife, who was the daughter of a Nazi general. Those who dispense such nonsense are nevertheless touching the surface of a serious problem, that of the relation between theory and practice. Strauss attributes to Lessing the "concealed" view that "all practical or political life is essentially inferior to contemplative life, or that all works, and therefore also all good works, are 'superfluous' insofar as the level of theoretical life, which is self-sufficient, is reached." Speaking about Thucydides, Strauss says, apparently in his own voice, that "wise men will always be inclined to see in political life an element of childishness."¹ One can reply that evil works are also superfluous for theoretical life, but this does not answer the question of the ground of good works. The decency of the philosopher seems to be a contingent character trait. If morality is exoteric, could one not argue that philosophy is the most dangerous of all gifts?

I have already mentioned that Strauss's rediscovery of the tradition of esotericism brought much ridicule and even hatred down on his shoulders and those of his students. It is worth describing an encounter I had with a charming and well-known Oxford don

a few years after leaving Chicago. This man, G. R. G. Mure, was a considerable scholar of Aristotle and Hegel. He was also an old-fashioned gentleman and someone who still embodied the Oxbridge philosophical world as it existed prior to World War I. In short, he had been formed by a style of thinking that had long since ceased to exist effectively. Although he was a life-long Oxonian, and at the time of which I speak, the Warden of Merton College, he was philosophically a stranger in his own home, who stated in print that if he had a son who wished to study philosophy, he would not send him to Oxford. There was, then, no fondness for contemporary analytical philosophy here, and more important still, Mure was an unabashed elitist who complained vigorously to me about the debasement of academic standards at Oxford, thanks to relaxed policies of admission. "Anyone can get into Oxford today," Mure assured me, noting that in his day, 2% of the applicants had been accepted, whereas the figure was now 6%.

I mention this because it is an essential part of the context of my anecdote. Mure had invited me to visit him in Oxford and to dine at Merton as his guest. At that time (1961), women could not avail themselves of this privilege, and my wife was left in the culinary hands of the Randolph Hotel. The entire atmosphere was heavy with the redolence of tradition and conservatism, just the place, one might think, for a good chat about esotericism. I was seated at high table next to an eccentric English economist straight out of a Hollywood movie, or better, an episode from the Inspector Morse television drama, in which all dons are monarchists and supercilious despisers of America and the lower classes. "What do Americans think of spiritualism?" my neighbor inquired in a loud and slightly menacing tone. This led, oddly enough, to a conversation about Aristotle, during which I was asked what I thought about some aspect of Aristotle's political writings. I do not recall the point my companion was making, but only that I began to suggest that Aristotle did not really believe the view in the passage under discussion. I was cut off in mid-sentence by Mure, who had apparently been listening to the conversation. "Oh, no, my dear chap! You must have been misled by the view that Aristotle had a secret teaching. Aristotle would

never have concealed his views; he was a philosopher!" A moment's pause. "And besides, he was a student of Plato!"

I want to suggest that Mure's conception of the truthfulness of philosophers was a product of his character or gentlemanliness, not of his theoretical understanding. This suggestion may be only partly correct, since Mure would have known of, and might have agreed with, Hegel's contention that, whereas philosophy is esoteric in its own right, the truth cannot be concealed but must reveal itself. However this may be, let us notice that a good character is essential to the foundation of political or personal morality. Mure's expertise in Aristotelian metaphysics and Hegelian logic were quite separate from his good character and could be found in Nazis as well as in gentlemen. If we think this point through, we may find the discomfiting truth that Heidegger and Strauss differ in decency or moral character but, despite Heidegger's idiosyncratic terminology, not entirely as partisans of theory. One more disconcerting question: if the truth requires the practice of esotericism, if simple decency demands that the philosopher promulgate a salutary exoteric doctrine, then is it not an act of indecency to make manifest the distinction between esotericism and exotericism?

Strauss could have been a mathematical logician and a conservative without exciting anything more than an embarrassed reserve on the part of his liberal admirers. But the claim that philosophers concealed their views for political purposes offends us at a very deep level. Even worse is the endorsement of esotericism as articulated by Nietzsche: "Everything deep loves a mask" and "everything rare for the rare." Nietzsche's left-wing admirers would have difficulty in presenting these assertions as made by a man of the left. Nietzsche himself was consistent and adamant in his praise of "elitism": "My fundamental thought—Rank-ordering." These are sentiments that cannot be tolerated by hyper-progressivists who have moved so far beyond Western metaphysical standards that they lack any basis for a defense of truth and Enlightenment. The statements are therefore either ignored or falsified by radical left-Nietzscheans.

The pedagogical or political task faced by Strauss in large part depended upon his solution to the problem of speaking

publicly about, and so revealing, the tradition of esotericism, while at the same time somehow honoring the judgment of its practitioners that certain truths should not be revealed. To some extent, Strauss could plead (borrowing an argument from Maimonides) that the tradition was in danger of being altogether forgotten; hence the need to rescue it from oblivion. But how can one call attention to the practice of esotericism without revealing at least some of the secret teachings? Since this is unavoidable, one must choose carefully which secrets to reveal in any particular set of historical circumstances. For example, in a democratic age, it is relatively safe to expose the concealment of enlightened views by those thinkers who lived in an aristocratic, traditional society. Trouble arises when one attempts to provide a cautious interpretation of radical views that upset or reverse the dominant opinions of the time.

Let us remember that Strauss distinguished between (at least) two kinds of esotericism. The first kind is employed in times of the religious and political persecution of philosophy. The second kind, however,—and it is to this that Nietzsche alludes—is not historically conditioned but has its roots in the natural distinction between the few and the many. It seems reasonable to argue that the first kind of esotericism need no longer be practiced when the times are right for frankness. Strauss in effect followed this inference in the case of the thinkers of the early Enlightenment, who intended their veiled thoughts to be discerned by free thinkers even while protecting themselves from persecution by the oblique representation of their doctrines. One might suppose that the secret teaching of the medieval Arabic and Hebrew philosophers could be revealed in our own time, during which one is apparently free to say anything. But Strauss's "interpretations" of people like Halevi and Maimonides were, if anything, more obscure than the originals. In the case of Maimonides, Strauss seems to have followed a policy that infuriated believers and unbelievers alike. The first, disregarding Maimonides' bad reputation among his contemporaries as an unorthodox and possibly heretical thinker, were repelled by Strauss's broad hints that Maimonides was an Aristotelian, not a believing Jew (although I should add that these hints were themselves veiled

over by Strauss's insistence that Maimonides was writing for the most part, even in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, as a commentator on the Bible and Jewish tradition). The second group, the unbelievers, were motivated either by the aforementioned assumption that philosophers always speak the truth, or that one must take a historical view of philosophy and understand it as the voice of the time. On this latter assumption, genius was cut to the pattern of convention, something that would be difficult to imagine in the natural sciences.

Rather than develop further the tangled motives for Strauss's great unpopularity as the rediscoverer of esotericism, let me suggest that he used the wrong rhetoric for his own time and place. On balance, I prefer Hegel's treatment of the same question in his lectures on the history of philosophy. To repeat a previous remark, Hegel denies the claims, current in his own time, that Plato practiced esotericism, on the ground that the philosopher cannot philosophize with his ideas in his pockets. This ground is to say the least a curious one for a thinker who lectured regularly to students who were preparing to join the Lutheran clergy. But Hegel is right in saying immediately afterward that philosophy is by its nature esoteric. In order to show the truth of this judgment, however, one must actually philosophize, and this means with one's ideas on the table, not concealed in one's pockets. This is especially true in times during which esotericism need not be invoked in order to preserve one's life or liberty. In such a time, it is incumbent upon the philosopher to present as forceful and detailed a statement of his or her doctrines as is humanly possible. Only this will attract the best young minds to a genuine philosophical encounter, assuming, as did Strauss, that philosophy was in radical decline. In order to recapture the best minds for philosophy, one cannot rely upon exoteric statements of natural right and the irrefutability of religion, while at the same time dropping broad hints that the atheists and materialists were either entirely correct or themselves irrefutable. Needless to say, it does not follow from this that those who speak frankly about their views are for that reason morally or theoretically superior to Strauss.

During my first years as a graduate student, I saw these questions almost entirely from Strauss's viewpoint. I had not yet understood

the inner implications of the fact that I was vehemently and publicly defending the existence of esoteric doctrines, and furthermore, if the truth be told, that I was very eager to outdo Strauss himself in my discovery and public statement of the content of these doctrines. One thing at least I must have seen, if only intuitively. If one is going to reveal the practice of esotericism, and this, of course, means that one can do it at the risk of one's academic career but not one's life, then one has to go all the way. Strauss did not do this. It was his failure to exercise greater boldness in defending his already bold claim that I could not accept. Strauss would have explained this by saying, as I noted above, that I liked to *épater le bourgeois*. I can only say in reply that his way led to what was for me an unsatisfactory political stance, which at its worst is directly responsible for what is today called "Straussian."

This problem can also be stated as follows. Strauss was neither an ancient Greek nor a medieval Jew but a resident of the declining stage of the late-modern world that had been formed by ideas which were part of the esoteric teaching of the great founders of modernity. The first task for the would-be reformer under these circumstances is to rethink the entire modern tradition from the standpoint of contemporary values. References to esotericism are out of place at this stage of the enterprise; what is worse, they are counter-productive because they go so deeply against the grain of contemporary prejudices. Let us say that the correct use of esotericism under these circumstances is to conceal it entirely. Furthermore, it is in the long run a mistake to express one's reforms in the rhetoric of ancient and medieval thinkers, especially if the deeper content of that rhetorical surface cannot be revealed because this content is reserved for the few. Since the many outnumber the few, the inevitable result is a denaturing of Strauss's own deepest views; at best, perhaps, the result is something like Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*. At the worst, we arrive at the completely spurious association of Strauss with American neo-conservatives and the foreign policy of the administration of the second President Bush.

Let me be very clear about the following point. Strauss's students and the students of his students have produced many extremely

fine books, and I have no wish to dissociate myself from this splendid heritage of my late teacher. I am endeavoring to make quite a different point. The anti-Straussian academic public, which is certainly in the overwhelming majority, despite Strauss's ever-increasing notoriety, takes its bearings by the worst elements of *soi-disant* "Straussians" and uses this as an excuse to ignore, and a weapon to attack, what is best in the Straussian tradition. The current rediscovery of Strauss and the use to which his name has been put confirms or (to be more cautious) is entirely compatible with my point.

The issue of esotericism proved to be the grain of sand in the oyster of contemporary liberal-progressive academia, but a grain of sand that produced a terrible itching sensation rather than a pearl. Surely the master of esotericism must himself write as he reads. Do not his constant criticisms of the twentieth-century version of enlightened liberalism show the grave political dangers of Strauss's teaching, despite these occasional favorable references to Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill? Whatever Socrates may have advocated in Plato's *Republic*, was not G. R. G. Mure in principle correct to say that philosophers always speak the truth? And if it is indeed true that Strauss practiced esotericism, what are we to make of his interpretations of the great figures of the Western tradition themselves? Is Strauss not guilty of lying in the service of his own elitist and thoroughly un-modern views? These are the charges that were and are now being leveled against Strauss.

Let me summarize this line of reflection. Strauss hoped to plant the seeds of a revolution in contemporary political thinking, and initially in the scholarly disciplines of social and political science. This hope makes sense if and only if the times are right for a public statement of esotericism. Strauss gave us a veiled presentation, or what one may call an exoteric version of esotericism. Precisely if we accept his judgment that our epoch is deeply nihilistic, this is not the time for caution. The more one thinks about it, the clearer it becomes that Strauss did not believe in the possibility of a full statement of the philosophical analysis of religion and politics. His way out of nihilism was through the revitalization of tradition. Whereas this has attractive political implications, it is not theoretically attractive.

Therefore it did not capture the audience that should have been addressed, namely, the sharpest intellects and the most gifted revolutionaries, in a word, the young generation that would determine the success or failure of the nihilism of the old generation. Strauss obviously believed that what was required in our time was a cautious presentation of daring. But this posture is appropriate to times of relative stability, not to those in which nihilism is regarded as common sense if not quite as pure reason.

This last observation requires amplification. Strauss was from his youth a committed Zionist, and at the same time a devoted student of the medieval philosophical and theological tradition, with special emphasis upon Arabic and Hebrew. These studies led him both backward to an appreciation of the ancient Greeks and forward to a criticism of the spiritual shallowness of the modern epoch. I think it is fair to say that Strauss subscribed to the thesis that political liberalism without religion cannot sustain its own virtues. The political necessity of religion was enunciated by the great figures of Western thought from Plato to Rousseau. Today this thesis is regarded as conservative, not to say reactionary. For Strauss, it was rather the foundation of liberalism in the genuine sense of the term, namely, one that required a higher foundation than the merely human for its vitality and nobility. But it does not follow from this that Strauss was personally religious, as is today widely assumed by many with a religious agenda of their own. As Strauss once told me, "philosophers are paid not to believe." This apparently simple statement is in fact very deep and even obscure. But the failure to distinguish between philosophy and religion leads to philosophical confusion.

I am, then, suggesting that Strauss's many writings devoted to the quarrel between Athens and Jerusalem are extreme examples of his own esotericism because they give the impression that from the fact that philosophy cannot refute religion, it follows that the two are equal and philosophically compatible. It is then not noticed that this is itself a philosophical judgment, and that as such, it gives the palm to philosophy. In sum, Strauss never defended philosophy against religion in public but rather attempted to replace both of them with

a politicized substitute in which each is independent from the other. He thereby camouflaged the fact that the quarrel between Athens and Jerusalem is a philosophical debate. On his own understanding of religion, the latter has nothing to say about such a quarrel because to enter into the quarrel is to surrender to the judgment of reason. Strauss was fond of quoting Plutarch's assertion that to ask "what is god" is already to reveal oneself as an atheist.

We can therefore safely say that Strauss was a friend of religion, but that, given his understanding of philosophy, he could not have been personally religious. One might ask why I state this in public, and some of Strauss's disciples have protested the publication of a letter from Strauss to his friend Karl Löwith stating unequivocally that he is not a believer. These persons reveal the weak spot in Strauss's political rhetoric. It attempts to revivify late modern nihilism with weapons largely borrowed from medieval and classical solutions to the inner conflict between philosophy and religion. In order to come to grips with the defects of late modernity, and thus to rescue philosophy from its abasement, one must address oneself to the roots of modernity. And these roots are neither classical nor medieval. In a word, one must meet modernity on its own ground, not on the ground of Xenophon or Alfarabi.

Needless to say, I had not worked out these views during my tenure as Strauss's student. I was, however, full of doubts from the outset about the very doctrines by which Strauss had captured my loyalty. I knew that if philosophy is superior to poetry in one sense, this can only be because poetry is philosophy in another. My reservations about the Straussian program can be summarized in the assertion that I was (and am) a modern, not an ancient. But this did not interfere with my admiration for Strauss because I was not a "Straussian." And neither was he.

I want to make one more extended point about the question of esotericism. The simplest way to gain access to this problem is by thinking of ordinary behavior. In everyday life, we speak differently to different people, depending upon their capacity, the presence of an unsympathetic audience, the need to persuade such an audience, and so on. But we do not conceal our views continuously. If we did,

we could not communicate at all, since communication, even esoteric communication, depends upon an intelligible structure of experience that provides meaning to our discourse, whether disguised or open. The esoteric or concealed message is communicated to some segment of one's discursive audience, and the attention of this audience must be captured by the quality of the exoteric presentation. We do not parse the rambling of fools for profound hidden meanings. Nor are we shocked when fools contradict themselves. By the same token, if one attempts to conceal one's thoughts in an inappropriate discourse, one runs the risk of not being understood because of the perfection of the disguise. This is why Maimonides compares esoteric speech to a golden apple covered over with a silver filigree with interstices so fine that only the most sharp-eyed can see through them to the gold within. We do not search for esoteric meanings in cook-books or treatises on engineering.

My first point, then, is that an esoteric text is accessible to a competent reader. And my second point is that the practice of esotericism is political; it depends upon the existence of a community of what I will call gold-souled persons. And this is reflected in our ordinary experience. All indirect discourse, whether irony, flattery, tact, or some other modality of speech, assumes a hierarchical audience. The politics of esotericism is aristocratic, but this is true at every level of human discursive existence. It is sheer hypocrisy to complain about Straussian elitism.

II

I want to tell briefly the story of my shift from the philosophy department to the Committee on Social Thought. In doing so, I draw freely from a testimonial written for the memorial service conducted at the University of Chicago in David Grene's honor shortly after his death. David Grene was the last of the great personalities who made up the Committee on Social Thought as I knew it in the early fifties. He was a man of unsurpassable vitality, and what is seldom found in persons of overwhelming energy, he possessed a deep intuition with respect to the human soul. Sometimes his energy and the strength of his convictions made

him seem intimidating, but his kindness and loyalty to his friends and students soon manifested themselves. I owe to this extraordinary man a debt that can never be repaid. We first met in 1952, through the mediation of Edward Shils, a prominent sociologist at the University of Chicago. At the time, I was a waiter at the faculty Quadrangle Club, and Shils was one of my regular customers. We soon became acquainted, and would engage in conversation as time allowed, on such theoretical topics as how to make ox-tail soup in a pressure cooker. Apparently Shils was impressed with my know-how; he asked me if I would like to join the Committee on Social Thought. I had no clear understanding of what that was, but on the basis of my exchanges with Shils, himself a remarkable and extremely complex man who could nevertheless act decisively when the occasion warranted it, I was entirely amenable. How could an academic institution that placed a premium on making ox-tail soup be all bad? Shils told me to arrange an appointment with David Grene, but to say nothing to him about financial assistance. "I'll take care of the money question," Shils assured me. As the day of my appointment with Grene approached, I became more and more nervous. We were to meet in the Common Room of the Social Science Building at a given hour. I entered the room in some perturbation, which was intensified by the sight of a red-faced man with flaming hair, dressed in an incandescent orange tweed suit, and seated with a cup of tea balanced on his crossed legs. With all of my physical dexterity and social suaveness at play, I lurched forward, smashed into his crossed legs, and spilled the cup of tea all over his orange trousers. For a moment, I thought of racing out of the room, convinced that I had destroyed my academic career. Suddenly a deep, resonant voice in an Irish accent boomed into my ear: "Come up to me office!" I followed Grene in a semi-trance to the fifth floor where he was ensconced in a long garret-like room. As I stood shaking at one end of the room, Grene paced off in the opposite direction and took a stand with his back to me and his hands clasped in what I took to be disdain. Suddenly he wheeled to face me, and punctured the air with an abrupt and totally unexpected question: "How much money d' ye want?"

Precisely the topic I had been warned by Shils not to raise! When I succeeded in gathering my wits, I found that I was a member of the Committee on Social Thought and the recipient of a handsome fellowship. This was the best entrance examination I have ever taken. To me, it expresses the epitome of the good old days of the Committee. No one asked me for a transcript or letters of recommendation, nor was I pressed to write an essay describing my plan of future study. All that was required of me was my recipe for ox-tail soup for Shils and the spilling of tea over David Grene's trousers. There were truly giants in those days!

The students on the Committee were different from those in the philosophy department in several respects. On the whole, they were broader, livelier, more imaginative, and less directly concerned with professional success. The Committee was very well supported financially, thanks to the largesse of Elinor Castle Nef, the extremely wealthy wife of the chairman, John U. Nef, and could afford to attract top prospects from other departments, needless to say, much to the annoyance of their colleagues. We were also graced with the frequent appearance of world-class personalities, with whom we could mingle at elegant *soirées* hosted by the Nefs in a luxurious apartment whose walls were lined with French Impressionist paintings, and where ladies in black dresses and white aprons served Viennese pastry with Schlagobers. Our distinguished guests included T. S. Eliot, Jacques Maritain, Louis Massignon, Colin Clark, and Mies van der Rohe, among others.

The general atmosphere produced by this mixture of money, fame, and the genuine loyalty to intellectual distinction, together with a largely European faculty and world-view, required or elicited a certain urbanity among the older students that unfortunately was not quite suited to my experience or temperament. Nor was I alone in this respect. Nothing in my past experience had prepared me for the sight of John U. Nef, wearing his *Legion d'Honneur* ribbon and striding toward me down a long hallway arm in arm with Mies Van Der Rohe, a rather tall and imposing presence, with the greeting; "My dear Rosen! You're looking very dapper this evening! May I introduce Mies Van Der Rohe?" My memory of the introduction

is surreal but existentially accurate. As I reached out to shake his hand, Van Der Rohe walked right over, or through, me, trampling me into the carpet.

Let me hasten to add that the majority of the faculty members were at least as capable as the graduate students of seeing the risible elements in these *soirées*. But they were not simply risible. They prepared us for the great world of culture and fame in a way that did not exist in the philosophy department. I do not mean that we learned to be gratified by the presence of famous persons. The contrary would be in many respects closer to the truth. But the variety and generally high achievements of our distinguished visitors brought to life the dedication to interdisciplinarity and creativity that we espoused. It is easy, and to some extent necessary, to laugh at the salon-like atmosphere of the Committee, but I want to put it on the record that I never encountered anywhere else in the academic world a comparable degree of vitality, imagination, and support.

It would have been widely agreed, I believe, by the students of my generation, that David Grene was the pulse-beat of the Committee on Social Thought. Grene was not the most famous member of the Committee, but he possessed the greatest vitality and was the most fully engaged teacher, with the possible exception of Yves Simon, a former student of Maritain and a man of great character. With all his virtues, however, Simon lacked the spiritual energy and charisma that Grene possessed in abundance. There was a kind of wildness and freedom from convention in Grene that supplemented his mastery of Greek and Latin and brought classical drama and poetry to life. Grene possessed a beautiful voice and the theatrical gift of enacting all roles in a Greek tragedy. This gift was somewhat compromised by a penchant, probably unconscious, for seeing the ancient Greek dramatists as anticipations of Yeats and John Millington Synge. But this fault—and it must be identified as such—was balanced by the virtue of being able to draw us directly into a play—and this remark holds for Shakespeare as well as for Aeschylus and Sophocles—in a way that a philological analysis alone could never accomplish. One might wish to argue that it was the wrong play into which we were drawn, but I think that

this would be unfair. I mention it only because it is a necessary part of the contrast between Grene and Leo Strauss, and that contrast defines the inner structure of the Committee on Social Thought in the time that I was there.

At first glance, Grene and Strauss were almost but not quite opposites: on the one hand, a man of unrestrained passion and poetic flair, with a deep distrust of philosophy, extroverted, intuitive, the center of whatever circle he entered, a striking presence who was soon on a first-name basis with his students; on the other, a physically slight, soft-voiced, somewhat reserved and even masked German civil servant with very little if any poetic flair, who referred to his students as Mr. X or Miss Y, a man of enormous erudition with an eye for minute shades of meaning and a strong distaste for bombast, who spoke obliquely about obliquities. In sum, a spiritual representative of the Abbey Theater and a Hebrew Averroist: spontaneous frankness and prudential concealment.

As sometimes happens with persons of complementary characters, Grene and Strauss became somehow attracted to one another. I say "attracted" rather than "friends," but relations were warm and this encouraged the easy movement of students from Strauss to Grene and back again. Certainly Strauss was not jealous of Grene, and he encouraged his students to read Greek with him. At first, Grene's generosity overcame temperamental and what may be called "doctrinal" differences. But the honeymoon was aborted one evening when Strauss gave a lecture on Thucydides in which he criticized Grene's interpretation. I no longer remember the details, but Grene was deeply wounded, and relations between the two were never the same.

So far as I am aware, however, the students continued their close associations with both men, and there were no public ruptures or private recriminations, with one small exception. Grene indicated to me by a negative remark that my rather Straussian interpretation of Machiavelli's *Prince* had made him deeply unhappy, and that he was unable to support me for honors on my doctoral qualifying examination. I want to say at once that I never begrudged him this very human deviation from neutrality, nor did it affect the loyalty

and effort with which he supported me in my attempt to obtain a teaching position. There was something tragic about the fact that Grene's closest students were all, so far as I can remember, disciples or deep admirers of Strauss. Grene bore this burden with greatness of soul, and he will always have my gratitude and affection.

Despite the electricity generated by Grene's dynamism and his poetic perception, it was clear to those with eyes to see that a deeper, stronger, and purer electricity was emanating from the pallid features and fragile voice of Leo Strauss. His circle of students grew steadily larger, and a list of these students, together with the names of their own students, would include many of the best-known, and more important, the best American scholars of the history of political thought and political science of the last fifty years. As is inevitable in such cases, there was a natural rank-ordering of these students, and this in turn led to the previously discussed phenomenon of the "Straussians," with their concern for the preservation of esotericism and the exercise of prudence, as well as their tendency to exorcise those who did not adhere closely to what they took to be the tenets of Strauss's teaching. These mediocre spirits especially objected to someone like myself who actually wrote, for better or worse, on philosophical subjects, including the limitations of esotericism. I believe that I was the first student of Strauss to publish a book-length study of a Platonic dialogue, and the first to write extensively on Heidegger. This earned me the enmity of the more rigid Strauss students. There also seem to be a large number of self-styled "Straussians" who never knew the master, but who have come to his works through the influence of contemporary neo-conservatism, and whose tenacity in preserving the purity of Strauss's teaching is exceeded only by their ignorance of the content of that teaching.

During my student days with Strauss, it was taken for granted by the master and the students alike that the latter were novices, being trained with an eye to competence, and with little or no expectation of our producing "original" works, a word frequently associated by Strauss with charlatantry. We were in effect devoting ourselves to the life of philosophical scholarship, with the hope of producing useful commentaries on the works of the very few great thinkers, but

not, I must reiterate, of the works of the greatest thinkers, namely, Plato and Aristotle. I will not deny that there is something attractive about this modesty, but there is also something stultifying, and it is not surprising that eventually the members of the Strauss school turned to the production of books on Plato, Aristotle, and even Heidegger. I would be the last person to belittle competent scholarship, but it has to be said that there is something odd about dedicating one's life to the pursuit of wisdom while at the same time accepting that one is incapable, not simply of wisdom, but even of philosophy.

Note

- 1 The first quotation is from "Exoteric Teaching" in *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, selected and introduced by Thomas L. Pangle (University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London: 1989), p. 64. The second is from "Thucydides: The Meaning of Political History" in the same volume, p. 74.

CHAPTER TWO

Straussian Hermeneutics

I

I first encountered the hermeneutical problem some thirty years ago while studying at the University of Chicago with Leo Strauss. The following remarks are an attempt to arrive at a satisfactory formulation of the problem, not to answer it. In the course of this attempt, I want also to say something useful about my late teacher. Strauss is a man who attracts foolish praise and foolish criticism. No one who knew him well will misunderstand the previous assertion. He was a man of extraordinary intelligence, whose surface of common sense and sobriety concealed a depth of profound subtlety. To my mind, the hermeneutical program for which Strauss was notorious can be correctly understood only when we discover the key to the problem of interpreting Strauss's life. It should go without saying that this problem has nothing to do with personal or academic gossip, nor is it a question of amateur psychoanalysis. The problem which Strauss represents is scarcely intelligible in the terms of philosophy as a profession. In order to state this problem accurately, we require assistance from Nietzsche, who was Strauss's favorite modern thinker. This taste for Nietzsche gives us our clue in understanding the man who devoted his professional life to explicating the political thought of the rationalist tradition from Plato and Aristotle through Alfarabi and Maimonides to Hobbes, Spinoza and Locke. As is clear in Strauss's criticism of Rousseau, who was in an important sense a preparation for Nietzsche, there is a tension in the philosophical nature between sobriety and what Plato called divine madness. We cannot understand Leo Strauss without asking why he concealed his divine madness so carefully beneath the public face of sobriety. This in turn will require us to understand what is meant by divine madness.

What is today called "hermeneutics" is not simply a question of the meaning of a text. This is already implicit in the name. In the

pagan religion, Hermes was the messenger between gods and mortals. He thus personifies the classical view that gods and mortals can understand one another. It is of course true that the messages of the gods were often ambiguous. But there is no analogy between the ambiguity of a divine message and, say, contemporary "Structuralist" doctrines of ambiguity. In these doctrines, the text is independent of an author, and writing is both more fundamental than and independent of speech. But God, or the gods, speak their texts; the gods are more fundamental than, and the key to the sense of, their ambiguous messages. In the original sense of the term, there is, strictly speaking, no hermeneutical problem, despite the ambiguity of the divine messages, because this ambiguity will be removed within the experience of the addressee. It does not follow from this that either the gods or life can be understood fully. However, the ultimate limits to understanding are intrinsic to the nature of things. We may therefore refer to these limits as constituting a structure of existence, provided we are prepared to employ the term "structure" in a non-formal sense. Classical structuralism is the doctrine of indefinite limits. But the indefiniteness of the limits, as well as their limiting function, are grounded in the reciprocal relation of two orders of self-consciousness. It is here irrelevant whether we refer to this as the relation of subjectivity or by some other terminology. We are in the presence of souls conversing with souls. Speech is more fundamental than writing, because texts are intelligible only to living beings, and intelligence is discursive or dialectical. To think is inevitably to talk to oneself and to others. The intelligibility of a text thus derives from its nature as *conversation at second hand*. The superiority of dialogue to treatises is that of conversation at first hand.

From this standpoint, the hermeneutics of Heidegger or Wittgenstein is much closer to classical hermeneutics than is that of contemporary French thought, as exemplified by Derrida, Deleuze or Barthes, to name only these striking representatives. We should not be confused by the Heideggerean attack on subjectivity in ontology, or by the Wittgensteinian attack on psychologism in the philosophy of language. At least in the early Heidegger,

as in the late Wittgenstein, philosophical interpretation is rooted in a pre-theoretical understanding of human existence: of everyday life or the *Lebenswelt*. Despite all differences between the classical doctrine of nature and contemporary historicism, to take one's bearings by everyday life is to appeal to human nature. It could of course be claimed that, in both the early Heidegger and the late Wittgenstein, everyday life exhibits a certain priority of doing with respect to talking. But this might be countered with the objection that "doing" becomes human activity only through the mediation of talking. It is also irrelevant whether we speak of *Dasein* or human beings. Only talking beings exist; only talking beings write books. With all honor to divine madness, it is not books who write talking beings. And it is only a figure of speech to say that books talk to other books. The significance of books turns upon the *presence* of one intelligence to another, of one soul or spirit to another. We may therefore agree with Derrida that the history of western metaphysics from Plato to Heidegger is the history of the domination of Being understood as presence. Some of us at least will also agree that this is as it should be. For the difference between presence and absence is not visible in the absence of presence. It is possible that the fundamental error of Derrida and his followers is to understand "presence" exclusively as "presence of formal structure." Ironically enough in the present case, this is an error induced by respect for the paradigm of mathematics. It is also an oversimplification of the doctrines of Plato and Aristotle. The intellect, *nous*, is not a formal structure. Therefore we cannot grasp the soul entirely by means of the concept of a formal structure. The presence of one soul to another is the presence of absence as well as of presence.

From Plato to Heidegger and Wittgenstein, then, the task of hermeneutics is to understand written documents on the basis of one's understanding of speech: that is, of speaking beings in their daily intercourse with one another. Hermeneutics begins as the attempt by mortals to understand the gods. It ends as the attempt of mortals to understand one another. Whereas the professional beginning of the hermeneuticist may (but need not) be a written document, his actual beginning is with himself and his neighbors. I want

to expand this point with an example that is especially pertinent to a study of the hermeneutics of Leo Strauss. Let us suppose that a man who calls himself a philosopher is writing in an orthodox Christian community in sixteenth or seventeenth century Europe. Suppose further that, whatever his personal views on the truth of Christianity, he makes it plain that he wishes neither to destroy the faith of his fellow citizens nor to be persecuted by them. At the same time, he has found it necessary to write on the subject of religion in general, and Christianity in particular, in a philosophical vein. Now suppose finally that in his writing he repeats again and again that Jesus Christ is the prophet *par excellence*, that prophets have very powerful imaginations, and then, just once, perhaps in a footnote, that those who have powerful imaginations invariably possess weak intellects and so are unable to teach the truth. Are we to assume that the author's pen slipped on this unique occasion, or that he is signaling the clever reader that his characterization of Christ is pejorative? Since the author is writing at a time when heterodox views invite persecution, it is not very likely that he will provide us with clearly visible evidence of his disbelief in the teaching of Christ, should that indeed be the sound inference we are meant to draw from his words.

If we have noticed this contradiction in the plain sense of the text, what is our next step? We may search in this and other writings by the same author for evidence as to his views on the relative worth of prophecy and philosophy, the merits of Christ's teachings, and so on. However, the competent author cannot be expected to remove this contradiction in an explicit manner, in case his intention is ironical or anti-religious. We may, of course, find more evidence that bears upon our problem. But then this evidence becomes a hermeneutical problem in its own right. Having got this far in my analysis, I would myself assume that the author is an atheist. And I believe that I can justify this assumption rather directly, without invoking weighty tomes on the principles of hermeneutics. I claim this: there is nothing in the principles of interpretation that will permit us to assess the textual evidence, if we have no pre-textual understanding of human nature. It is a good bet that highly intelligent men

of orthodox views do not inadvertently contradict themselves on central points of faith. Of course, if the evidence for unorthodoxy looks slim, we might also conclude that no orthodox thinker will *intentionally* contradict himself on an article of faith. But then doubts as to the author's intelligence or competence arise. We might say that the author has nodded in penning the note in question. In this case he must have been fatigued indeed, since the conflict between imagination and intellect is quite central to the question of the authority of prophecy.

Let us vary the example a bit. We might claim that, whereas no one who asserts his religious belief in an orthodox age is lying, highly intelligent men often develop heterodox justifications of orthodox views. After all, Maimonides and Aquinas, to name no one else, were both regarded as heretics in their own age. The reply to this is quite simple. On the basis of what textual evidence have we arrived at the thesis of heterodoxy as opposed to disbelief or atheism? Since there are no outspoken authors in a highly orthodox age for obvious practical reasons (as well as for less obvious ones), we are back where we started from: in the presence of a textual contradiction implying disbelief or atheism. The question as to the intention of the author must be answered, in the last analysis (and so after careful philological study), from *outside the texts*. We have to decide whether the author of such a book could have contradicted himself inadvertently on a matter of such importance. For example, would he have allowed the publication of the book without subjecting it to careful scrutiny to delete slips? If we ourselves are dominated by historical theories to the effect that men of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries could not have been atheists in our sense of the term, we submit to interpretations of human nature themselves derived from texts. And how does one evaluate theories of human nature? By reading more texts? Procedures of this sort prevent us from even grasping the question, let alone trying to answer it. For on this account, the question must itself be a historical resident of the twentieth century, with no intrinsic meaning of its own. Who knows what the question would have meant in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Furthermore, if nineteenth and twentieth

century atheism is not possible in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, then the Christianity of Jesus and the Apostles could not be possible in *either* of these two modern periods.

I have no wish to denigrate philology and the historical sciences. I am concerned with a problem that is both simpler and more complex than philology and historical science. It is precisely the problem of how we understand texts and historical events. And therefore I say emphatically: it is false to claim that we understand a text by comparing it with other texts. The network of texts must be understood. It may be regarded by some as the fallacy of psychologism to say that we understand the network of texts on the basis of knowledge of human nature. I have been told that what counts as "human nature" itself varies from epoch to epoch; hence, in order to be established scientifically for a given epoch, a doctrine of human nature must be contained in representative texts of that epoch. This rests upon the assumption that there is no such thing as human nature, or that human "nature" is historical, and so that we have only historical opinions about human nature. My reply, of course, is that if there is no human nature, then there can be no history of opinions about human nature. If we ourselves do not know what it means to be a philosopher, then there is no possibility of our understanding philosophical texts. And *this* is the Nietzschean problem, the fundamental problem of the hermeneutics of Leo Strauss.

II

Leo Strauss is well-known, not to say infamous, for his claim to have rediscovered the tradition of esotericism in western thought from the early Greeks to, roughly speaking, the time of the French Revolution. Simply stated, Strauss claimed that many great thinkers (not just "philosophers" in the contemporary professional sense of the term) concealed their deepest views on controversial topics like religion or politics, from motives of philanthropy as well as playfulness or aristocratic pride. They wished to avoid persecution by the authorities, but at the same time to communicate with readers of their own kind, and especially to attract potential philosophers in a way that would lead these to think through popular opinions

by themselves. Many scholars have accepted this thesis in part, as for example with respect to the Hebrew and Arabic Middle Ages. I know of no one apart from Strauss's personal students, and one or two lifelong friends, who accepts it altogether. I myself regard the thesis as almost trivially true. My objection is that Strauss never stated it publicly in its full form. Strauss's statement of the thesis of esotericism is in fact exoteric, as he very well knew. The fullest statement of the thesis of esotericism, so far as I know, has been made only by Nietzsche. Strauss's criticism of Nietzsche, or of Nietzschean explicitness, is thus an essential aspect of his own exoteric statement of the thesis of esotericism. The disagreement between Strauss and Nietzsche turns upon the question of the possible mode of public existence of the philosopher. For Strauss, it was impossible and undesirable for the philosopher to reveal his nature publicly. Nietzsche, on the contrary, insisted upon doing so. This point will be meaningless to those who think of the public revelation of the philosopher as equivalent to the publication of books. I remind these readers that the interpretation of books depends upon one's understanding of human nature. Thus the interpretation of philosophical books depends upon one's understanding of the philosophical nature.

In order to give this difficult question its proper development, I plan to speak at some length about the relation between Strauss's views and those of Martin Heidegger. I will not provide documentation for all my remarks with long citations from the writings of these two men. For the most part, what I have to say is based either upon well-known and general beliefs, or else must be evaluated by the reader on the basis of his direct experience. The present essay is thus intended as an example of my thesis that philosophical hermeneutics is not a question of the comparison of texts. I can even go so far as to say that the reader who is not interested in either Leo Strauss or Martin Heidegger will be able to follow my argument quite easily, if he is interested in philosophy, and more specifically, in the nature of the philosopher.

It will be helpful to begin our discussion by asking why the thesis of esotericism has not been sympathetically received by the

English-speaking philosophical community. There are, I think, two main reasons for this. The first is that we have become accustomed to an extensive if not quite complete freedom of public expression, which blunts our taste, at least as scholars, for the rhetoric of indirection. This taste is still to be found among students of literature, but here, if I am not mistaken, indirection is understood as the gambit of imagination, not of discursive reason. The second reason has to do with the conception of philosophy that dominates our professional spokesmen in the universities. The most important characteristic of that conception is its distinction between argument and rhetoric, stemming from a widespread tendency to understand reason by the paradigm of mathematics. We see here a not always self-conscious political decision that informs the ostensibly technical point. It is not enough to say that philosophy is discursive reasoning, or logical demonstration and analysis. In a very specific sense, this would also have been claimed by thinkers of the medieval and early modern period who, like the anonymous philosopher of my example in the previous section, separated the imagination from the intellect, or condemned a strong imagination as the mark of a weak intellect. The question is why, granted that philosophy is argument, these arguments ought to be made in public. Even the most thoughtless representative of the Enlightenment will feel himself compelled to justify freedom of speech. It is not by chance that modern philosophy, obviously since the nineteenth century, and less obviously since the late seventeenth century, has raised freedom to the status of the highest principle, with a concomitant emphasis upon the function of the will. Strikingly enough, it has not been clearly perceived by contemporary analytical philosophers that freedom and discursive rationality are not entirely compatible in a technical sense. There is a conflict between the ideal of a publicly verifiable and thus canonical or universal mode of scientific discourse, and a public commitment to the freedom of the public.

This technical conflict reflects a failure to think through the relation between theory and practice, despite the machine-like frequency with which that relation is mentioned today. It reflects a failure to think through the nature of philosophy; and this failure

is now leading to a dissolution of the already slightly old-fashioned conception of rationality that dominated the analytical movement for more than fifty years. The central philosophical question of our generation is exactly the central problem of the period extending at least from the first to the seventeenth century: what is the relation between the intellect and the imagination? There is thus some difference between the predominant academic picture of philosophy during the period of Strauss's main work in this country, and the picture that today prevails, or is in the process of being painted. But the central obstacle to an appreciation of Strauss's work is perhaps constant: Strauss did not accept the rhetoric of the Enlightenment. He agreed with Rousseau on a critical point, that there is no intrinsic connection between scientific and moral progress. Differently stated, Strauss regarded the disinterested and complete employment of discursive intelligence as politically dangerous. On the contrary, his contemporaries, and especially in the United States, regarded it as the basis of political health. The antagonism which Strauss provoked was *moral*, not theoretical. There was, of course, a great deal of criticism that stemmed from slovenliness and an inability to reconsider fashionable opinions in the light of the evidence. But for our purposes, this may be disregarded. The real issue may be seen by contrasting the relative standing of Strauss and Nietzsche among professional intellectuals. It goes without saying that Nietzsche was the greater writer. But Nietzsche was also entirely opposed to the rhetoric of the Enlightenment. However, Nietzsche stated this opposition *in public*, and in the language of the will and imagination. In other words, he stated it in the language of the radical or political substratum of the Enlightenment.

It makes sense to speak of Nietzsche as a right-wing revolutionary (the phrase is Strauss's) and thus to link him with Marx, the left-wing revolutionary. This terminology already suggests a deeper unity beneath the surface differences. Both Marx and Nietzsche employed a powerful rhetoric of morality, in full view of the public and (despite Nietzsche's anti-democratic slogans) for the sake of the public. The purpose of revolution in both cases is to transform the human race into a higher type of being. The fundamental difference

between the two men is this: Nietzsche struggled to prepare a society in which the philosopher could exist publicly, whereas Marx struggled to prepare a society in which all men would be philosophers. The "conservative" or "reactionary" elements in Nietzsche's rhetoric stem from his aristocratic perception that not all men can be philosophers, regardless of the external conditions. The "radical" or "progressive" elements in Marx's rhetoric stem from his conviction that, given the proper external conditions, all men can be philosophers. Thus the rapprochement between Nietzsche and Marx, currently fashionable in Europe and steadily infiltrating the ostensibly sober bastions of analytical philosophy, is in part justifiable but at a deeper level, profoundly incoherent. Nevertheless, this incoherence does nothing to rob the ensuing rhetoric of its moral and political effectiveness.

It was this rhetoric, together with its moral and political consequences, that Strauss opposed. Let me underline the critical point. Whereas Strauss opposed Nietzsche's rhetoric, and so his decision to speak publicly about the true nature of the philosopher, he did not entirely disagree with Nietzsche's account of the philosophical nature. I would of course not go so far as to say that Strauss accepted this account. In Strauss's eyes, a disagreement over rhetoric was a disagreement over theoretical substance. How the philosopher presents himself in public is based upon his understanding of both himself and the public. Those who understand neither the one nor the other are incapable of grasping the centrality of the problem of rhetoric. They are *a fortiori* incapable of grasping the thesis of esotericism. It is this lack of capacity that led to the public acceptance of Nietzsche, and so to the essential democratization of an essentially aristocratic teaching. In this context, we should keep an additional point in mind. Nothing I have said so far forecloses the possibility that *Nietzsche himself practiced esotericism*. This was, incidentally, Strauss's own view of the matter. Those who shout at the top of their voices normally have something to conceal.

The fundamental problem of hermeneutics, then, is the significance of human existence. This question in turn leads us directly to ask: what is philosophical existence? If it is fair to say that the history

of western thought has been defined by the dialectical argument between the intellect and the imagination, then we might add that the central issue is the quarrel between philosophy and poetry. This quarrel has not always been stated explicitly by its protagonists. On more than one occasion, as we have already observed, the quarrel has taken the form of an argument about freedom. One of the most superficial forms of the quarrel is that between analytical philosophy and various schools of "continental" thought (as though philosophical analysis did not also originate on the "continent"!). Human existence cannot be captured by a methodology, as should be evident from the contemporary dissolution of the analytical movement itself. What we want to know is first whether any method at all is helpful in puzzling out the roots of our life, and second, if the answer is affirmative, whether the guiding method is philosophical or poetic. To those who are inclined to say: "both," we must reply that one does not resolve a quarrel by disregarding it.

In considering the opposition to Straussian hermeneutics, we have seen that the quarrel is here, if not yet between philosophy and poetry, one of clashing moral rhetorics. It therefore becomes a moral, and not just a theoretical, obligation to understand this quarrel properly. We owe this, not to Leo Strauss, but to ourselves.

III

When I began my studies with Leo Strauss, the term "hermeneutical" had not yet become fashionable. We knew it primarily as an expression referring to the interpretation of the Bible. Neither do I recall that "interpretation" was given the status of a technical term. The central problem for us was how to read a philosophical book, and at the center of the center, was the question of how to read a Platonic dialogue. What attracted me to Strauss was not his method, but his direct and penetrating good sense. It is of course true that Strauss had his methods (and I purposely shift to the plural). However, they sprang from the soil of everyday experience. One hardly needed Strauss to teach him that it was frequently the mark of intelligence to conceal one's opinions. If I may add another personal remark, I came to Strauss as a poet who had accepted

T. S. Eliot's thesis that philosophy and poetry are two different languages about the same world. As a corollary of this thesis, I took it for granted that one cannot, in the nature of things, and prudence apart, say exactly what one means. Every practicing writer knows in his fingers the Heideggerean thesis that Being reveals itself in a concealed form. It is not by chance that Heidegger developed a doctrine of "poetical" thinking. Poetry is the language of creation, and the paradigm of the creator is God, who reveals himself within his creation even as he conceals himself behind it. Every poet regards himself, explicitly or implicitly, as a god. The first thing that Strauss taught me was to question the accuracy of this belief. (Not much later, I was to learn from Alexandre Kojève how to rehabilitate this belief in a philosophical manner.)

It now seems plain that Strauss referred to reading, rather than interpreting, as part of his distinction between the human and the divine. This is not to say that he was religious in the usual sense of the term. On the contrary, he rejected the modern notion of creativity together with its Biblical paradigm. Nevertheless, Strauss accepted the religion of the philosophers, by which I mean to say that he revered the Ideas of Plato, or the forms and divine intellect of Aristotle. I purposely join together doctrines which are not self-evidently the same. Strauss was altogether informed concerning the Aristotelian criticism of Plato. However, this must be qualified by two remarks. First, since Strauss's understanding of Plato and Aristotle differed from the orthodox or academic interpretations, he would have formulated this criticism quite differently from most scholars. Second, whatever the difference between Plato and Aristotle, they agreed upon the necessity to draw a distinction between the eternal and the temporal, or at least between the sempiternal and the temporal. I am not for the moment concerned with whether the distinction is sound, or even defensible. One could even say, in order to avoid this extraordinarily difficult question, that it was part of Straussian pedagogics, and hence of his *exoteric doctrine*, to make this distinction. In a slightly oversimplified, but not misleading, formulation, the task of the philosopher was for Strauss to replace opinion by knowledge. This could be done only if there

is a distinction between opinion and knowledge, and so between opinion and truth. While always emphasizing the difficulty in arriving at truth, not to say the impossibility, Strauss nevertheless described philosophy as the evaluation of opinions in the light of the truth. He was fond of quoting Pascal's remark that we know too much to be ignorant and too little to be wise. This is just to say that he was a Platonist with respect to the doctrine of the "prophetic" nature of the soul, discussed by Socrates in the *Phaedrus*. The soul discerns the eternal truth, although it cannot capture that truth in *logos*.

Here, then, is a central tenet of Straussian hermeneutics. We have a presentiment of what we can come to know, and we can only come to know in part any fundamental or comprehensive point. If one resists the temptation to indulge in pedantic distinctions, it should be clear that Strauss's Platonism is not radically distinct from at least the early Heidegger's doctrine, ostensibly rooted in anti-Platonism, that the hermeneutical circle amounts to a pre-awareness of what we come to know explicitly, altogether or in part. For Heidegger, of course, *Dasein* is the source of its own pre-awareness, the structure and content of which are both radically temporal. For Strauss, the pre-awareness of the human soul arises from its glimpse of what transcends temporality. The ontology of *Sein und Zeit* is "hermeneutical" because of the thesis that every human presentiment is conditioned by historical circumstances. To exist is to interpret in the sense of deciding what to do, given one's circumstances. Nor is this simply a question of Aristotelian *phronēsis* or practical intelligence. In Aristotle, the ends regulating our decisions are not historical, whereas in Heidegger, they are precisely an epochal revelation or gift of historicity. Differently stated, whatever the "structural" character of historicity, human existence is "open" in the sense that I must choose at each moment how to live a genuine life in terms of the parameters of my historical and existential situation. It is thus a matter of interpretation what I ought to do next, and hence what kind of life I ought to lead. Despite all his flexibility and admiration for prudence, Strauss accepted the Platonic hierarchy of human lives. This amounts in the last analysis to accepting the Aristotelian

doctrine of the eternity of the ends of human activity. The kind of life we ought to lead is not a matter of interpretation. Interpretation arises only in the delicate process of adjusting the best life, and so the natural order of ends, to shifting human circumstance.

One can of course assert that it remains to be shown whether the distinction between eternity and temporality is valid. Strauss might reply that if the doctrine of the radical historicity of truth (so far as it is accessible to human beings) is itself true, then it contradicts itself. In my opinion, Heidegger tacitly granted this point when he abandoned the attempt to complete *Sein und Zeit*. But that is surely another story. More interesting here is the fact that neither Strauss nor Heidegger could "demonstrate" by means of discursive or deductive argument his central tenet. Strauss claimed that we have a perception of the eternal; Heidegger claimed that we did not. It would be a complete misunderstanding to attempt to demonstrate one or the other of these tenets. Deductive arguments are only as true as the content of their premises. In the last analysis, this content is supplied, or else supported, by hunches, intuitions, presentiments, or divine revelations. From this standpoint, it makes little difference whether we call Strauss a Heideggerean, or Heidegger a Straussian. The difference becomes meaningful only after we have decided which tenet is the best. It is indeed the case that we cannot argue until we have chosen our "axiom," in the literal sense of "what is worthy of belief."

Strictly speaking, of course, it makes little if any difference whether Strauss used the word "interpretation" or the word "reading." I am trying to bring out the following point. It was at least a part of his pedagogics or exoteric teaching that there is a paradigm of the true reading of a philosophical book. We must now introduce a further tenet of Straussian hermeneutics, and one which is as problematical as the first. The paradigm of the true reading of a philosophical book is to be found, not in another book, but in our understanding of human life. For all practical purposes, it is to be found in our understanding of everyday, pre-scientific or pre-theoretical life. Our presentiment of the eternal is not simply a transcendence of the human or natural toward the divine. It is

an insight into human nature, or more generally, into nature. It is not simply the case that ordinary life is the surface or horizon of extraordinary life. For Strauss, the depths of life are visible only within the surfaces of life. The paramount importance of Plato for Strauss now becomes intelligible. Strauss did not become a Platonist because of his tenet concerning our presentiment of the eternal. His "Platonism" (itself a problematical expression) arose from the conviction, based upon many decades of intense reading and reflection, that the Platonic dialogue, as opposed, say, to Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*, is the most powerful lens by which to make plain the meaning of everyday life.

Let me state at once the difficulty that arises from the two doctrines of esotericism and the paradigmatic status of the everyday. *If the truth is to be found in our everyday experience, how can it be truly mirrored by an intricate, infinitely elusive and esoteric text?* Why did Strauss claim to have understood human experience, however inadequately, thanks to his study of Plato? How would he reply to the charge that it is the naïveté of the scholar to "interpret" life through the optics of his favorite author? If there is an answer to this second question, it can only be found by considering the first, which is deeper and more comprehensive. The question, in a slightly odd but nevertheless legitimate formulation, is this: what if everyday life is the exoteric teaching of nature? In this case, even if the exoteric is a clue to the esoteric, we cannot understand the latter in terms of the former. We come to a sound understanding of someone's exoteric teaching only after we are familiar with his esoteric teaching. So too in the case of nature, or of everyday life. This is not necessarily to deny that Strauss's exoteric teaching was more politically salutary than, say, the greater outspokenness of Nietzsche or Heidegger. For the time being, we are not concerned with the public safety, but with the nature of the philosophical life.

I think that Strauss's position becomes plausible when it is stated in something like this form: there are features of everyday life which are invariant marks of every recognizably human interpretation of existence. These features are "exoteric," not because we may dispense with them when we develop a deeper or esoteric theory,

but because they define the intersection between the philosopher and the citizen, or the private and public domains. All questions of the accessibility of the eternal to one side, to deny the aforementioned intersection is to deprive public life of stability. But it is also to deprive philosophy of any standard for distinguishing between the products of the imagination and the discoveries of the intellect. If philosophy is always and entirely "interpretation" of the ordinary, then every such interpretation becomes extraordinary by definition. At the same time, the perception of those exoteric marks common to public and private existence is not something that is amenable to demonstration. We can be more or less articulate in calling attention to them, or in describing them. By hypothesis, however, the addressee of our rhetoric must see for himself what we are talking about. It makes no sense to say that the roots of truth are both above and beneath the soil. Less poetically expressed, it cannot be right that the basis of truth is accessible to the ordinary healthy intellect yet also requires a correct understanding of subtle theories in order to become properly visible. Similarly, the philosophy of science which grounds science in observation statements or immediate experience, yet defines these observations and experiences theoretically, is obviously circular.

This plausible restatement of Strauss's position nevertheless will require some modification of his doctrines, as I hope to show. It is not simply the case that we must intuit the exoteric marks of nature, as I have called them. Most sensible men would agree upon the identity of a rather large number of these marks. To repeat only an earlier example, what sane man would deny that there are occasions when we rightly conceal our views? Even Kant wrote to Mendelssohn: "I would never say anything I don't believe. But it would never occur to me to say everything that I believe." And yet, the agreement of sensible men leads to fundamental philosophical quarrels. It leads, for example, to the widespread contemporary rejection by sensible men of Strauss's sensible thesis of esotericism. More generally, there seems to be a discontinuity between our perception of the obvious and the philosophical doctrines we infer from this perception. It would be attempting too much to offer to answer this question

in an essay. However, we must attempt to show why the difficulty in question leads to a serious criticism of Straussian hermeneutics.

IV

The fundamental question of Straussian hermeneutics is how to read a Platonic dialogue. According to Strauss, the dialogue is an artful mirror of everyday life. Strauss sometimes referred to the original of the image as "the Whole," an expression to be found within the dialogues, to say nothing of other philosophers as different from Plato as Hegel and Heidegger. "The Whole" is not the same as everyday life; to mention only the obvious, we do not have conceptual access to the Whole in our everyday experience. What Strauss meant, then, is that the Whole is prefigured within the surface textures of everyday life. A further qualification is necessary. He meant by "everyday life" *political life* in approximately the sense this expression would have for Aristotle in, say, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*. Thus Strauss did not mean by "everyday life" what Husserl calls the *Lebenswelt*, even though Husserl refers to the latter notion as equivalent to the Greek *doxa*, and even though Strauss was certainly influenced by Husserl (and Heidegger) in arriving at his own insights. In Husserl, the *Lebenswelt* is not primarily political; on the contrary, political life is a modality of the *Lebenswelt*. I do not believe it would be a simple matter to explain briefly and clearly what Husserl meant by the *Lebenswelt*. But we can bring out another aspect of the difference between Strauss and Husserl by saying that, from a Straussian standpoint, the *Lebenswelt* is already a Kantian *Gedankending* or scientific construction. I say "from a Straussian standpoint" because I never heard this criticism from Strauss, but have inferred it from what I know of his views. Husserl's initial description of the *Lebenswelt* is of the pre-theoretical dimension of human experience. Nevertheless, Husserl describes the "structures" of the *Lebenswelt* scientifically, by means of his phenomenological method. To Strauss, there can be no scientific description of the pre-theoretical because it is, as the origination of science, already both theoretical and practical. To call it "political" is to say, as was at least implied in Husserl's reference to *doxa*, that it is the domain, not merely of values, but of

practical intelligence, and so of hunches, presentiments, divinations, and intuitions. A phenomenological description of the *Lebenswelt* can thus get no closer to political existence than can a phenomenological description of religion correspond to religious belief.

Strauss therefore believed, or at least publicly professed, that we can abstract from the extreme doctrines of Platonic philosophy, such as that of the philosopher-king, and arrive at a stratum of political existence which was identically understood by Plato and Aristotle. He also believed, or professed to believe, that this political "reading" of the everyday was not merely shared by Plato and Aristotle, but that it is true. By insisting upon a level of agreement between Plato and Aristotle, incidentally, Strauss was in my view engaging in exotericism. Strauss knew very well, and regularly admitted, that Plato was "divinely mad" in the sense that he stated basic tenets in an exaggerated way, whereas Aristotle was merely daimonic, or stated his basic tenets in a sober way. This is a crucial admission. It amounts to the assertion that Plato is in an important sense akin to Nietzsche and Heidegger, as Aristotle is not. Yet Strauss concealed the import of this admission by assimilating Plato to Aristotle. I do not wish to be misunderstood on this point. Plato's rhetoric under any reading is complex and contains an exoteric surface of its own, one which gave rise to the orthodox interpretation of Platonism, which we find in all the standard reference-works, to say nothing of some of the publications of Nietzsche and Heidegger. I have it on the authority of one of Heidegger's closest students that Heidegger admitted to never having understood Plato, whereas his insight into Aristotle is a part of the public record. Nevertheless, I stand by my remark. In the present context, Heidegger is more like Plato than he is like Aristotle. And Strauss must have known this.

We now see a crucial feature of Straussian hermeneutics. Although ostensibly rooted in Plato, it was in fact a consequence of Strauss's Aristotelianizing of Plato. It would not be enough to say that Strauss restricted himself, in his public function as a professor of political science, to the reading of political texts. There is a difference between the political philosophy of Plato and that of Aristotle which, on Strauss's own principles, provides us with a clue as to

the theoretical differences between the two. The political, in the special Straussian sense, is an essential modality of the everyday, and the everyday contains and makes visible the basis of theory. The extreme elements in Plato's political philosophy, or in the presentation of Plato's political philosophy, such as the paradigm of the philosopher-king, make plausible the thesis that the extraordinary is prefigured within the ordinary. However, Aristotle's presentation of political philosophy is based upon his tripartite distinction of theory, practice, and production. No one would deny that a problem exists for Aristotle concerning the relation between politics and theoretical philosophy. But that relation is not visible in his political writings. On the contrary, these writings are based upon the premise that political science (which includes ethics) is independent of theoretical science. Practical intelligence characterizes the art of the statesman. What one could call, by an extension of sense, a "theoretical" analysis of politics is in fact for Aristotle a practical analysis. The main point is easily expressed by noting that there is no obvious connection between the *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics* on the one hand, and the *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *De Anima* on the other. To make that connection explicit would be to Platonize Aristotle. It might seem to follow that to Aristotelianize Plato would be to deny the very unity of theory and practice we have just attributed to him. This is true enough, but there is another sense in which one may Aristotelianize Plato, and this is the way taken by Strauss.

Aristotle's political writings are based upon the premise that practical judgment is an extension of common sense. The "science" of politics is that of understanding the life of the gentleman. But the gentleman is not the philosopher, as Plato would certainly have agreed. If political life shows in some direct manner the nature of the philosophic life, it must to that extent violate the identification of the political science with the articulation of gentlemanship. For example, the gentleman is moderate, whereas the philosopher, according to the Platonic dialogues, is also marked by divine madness. To say nothing else, the philosophical nature exhibits elements of immoderation or extremism in speech and deed that are antithetical to the behavior of the gentleman. The gentleman does

not practice *akribologia* or split verbal hairs, according to Aristotle, whereas the philosopher does this regularly. The upshot of the difference between the philosopher and the gentleman is, I think, that everyday life in the Aristotelian sense cannot be used as a paradigm for the unity of theory and practice in the Platonic sense. One cannot conflate the Aristotelian and the Platonic senses of the everyday. They may be related in important ways, but in still more important ways, they differ. It was a maxim of Strauss's interpretation of classical political philosophy that the gentleman is the accessible imitation, i.e. the exoteric image, of the philosopher. But this makes sense neither on Platonic nor Aristotelian grounds. It becomes defensible and coherent only on the basis of a mixing of Platonic and Aristotelian views. In Strauss's case, the mixture amounted to blending the Aristotelian doctrine of the everyday with the Platonic doctrine of the unity of theory and practice. Plato was thus supplied with an Aristotelian sense of everyday or political life, into which had been inserted the Platonic notion of the everyday as the paradigm of philosophical experience.

I do not mean to imply that Strauss was unaware of the difference between Plato and Aristotle on this point. I believe that his procedure was conscious or exoteric. It is true that Strauss often alluded to the manic aspect of the philosophical nature. But in my experience, with a single exception, he never went farther than allusions. And the exception proves the general rule. Strauss once gave a seminar on Plato's *Statesman* which was by general consensus the most exciting display of his hermeneutics we had seen, or were to see during my stay at Chicago. At the end of the seminar, Strauss told the only two students who had received an "A" in this seminar that he was quite dissatisfied with it, and would never again teach such a course. He did not explain the nature of his dissatisfaction, but I believe that I now understand it. He had gone too far in making public the nature of philosophy. Students of Leo Strauss have often conjectured whether he himself practiced esotericism. Of course he did. His entire public presentation of the distinction between esotericism and exotericism, and so of the nature of the Platonic-Aristotelian teaching, was *exoteric*. This incidentally

explains two other, closely related facts about Strauss. He did not engage in serious philosophical discussions in his seminars, and he never published what would be regarded by both professional philosophers and the divinely mad as a serious philosophical discussion of fundamental questions.

In this light, let us come back to the nature of the Platonic dialogue. I said above that the Platonic dialogue is, according to Strauss, an artful mirror of everyday life. We now have to ask: what is meant by "artful?" And of which sense of "everyday life" is it a mirror? (These questions could be posed in a more complex, and unnecessarily obscure manner, by noting that a mirror-image reverses the spatial order of the original.) If the first step in the philosophical life is a perception of the distinction between the noble and the base, and if this distinction is directly visible to practical intelligence as it functions in the everyday or political domain, then the same perception must serve as the key to unlocking the riddle of the Platonic dialogue. But the Platonic dialogue presents us with an intricate web of the everyday and the extraordinary. The characters in Plato's dialogues explicitly discuss everyday themes in an everyday manner, and extraordinary themes in an extraordinary manner. It is trivially true (although it does not seem to have been noticed by many specialists in the field) that these two kinds of discussion are united within the web of the dialogue as a drama. However, it does not follow that the artful drama mirrors faithfully the relation between ordinary and extraordinary discussions in everyday or political life. Is it not the case that the *artfulness* of the dialogue-form is required in order to make visible, whether implicitly or explicitly, a connection between these two modes of discourse that is not visible in everyday life? If the dialogue is to perform the *metabasis eis allo genos* forbidden by Aristotle, if it is to expose the unity of theory, practice, and production, must it not deviate from everyday life in so doing? Must it not deviate from everyday life as it is ordinarily lived, and not merely as Aristotle describes it? Aristotle's suppression of philosophy from his discussion of the everyday, except to give a very general account of the philosophical life as the highest form of human practice, coincides with the everyday as we ordinarily live it.

The problem I have in mind is not answered by the usual Straussian moves. I am aware that Socrates is never presented in conversation with a mature philosopher, except when, in the *Parmenides*, he is himself a youth of sixteen. It is also true that Socrates' interrogations normally end in *aporia*, that Socrates purports to know nothing and teach nothing, that even "late" Platonic spokesmen like Timaeus and the Eleatic Stranger shift from *logos* to *mythos* at crucial points. To make the point from a slightly different angle, Strauss rightly noted that, in the Platonic dialogues, the dramatic deed is often more revealing than the explicit speech. I have no serious quarrel with any of these observations. To any but the most obtuse reader, philosophy is revealed in the dialogues in a concealed form. And the obtuse reader will take the concealed form for the original.

Strauss, however, was not an obtuse reader. He could scarcely have formulated the distinction between esotericism and exotericism without understanding the significance of the concealed presentation of philosophy in an "artful image" of everyday life. There is a dialectical if not formal contradiction between philosophy and everyday life. Even if the first step toward a philosophical existence is visible in everyday life, it does not follow that the second step is visible. It does not follow, in other words, that the second step is contained within the surfaces of ordinary life in the Aristotelian sense employed by Strauss. Aristotle's reticence about philosophy when discussing ethics and politics turns out to convey the same point as the concealed presentation of philosophy by Plato. *Philosophy is dangerous to the public order*. Plato is considerably more daring than Aristotle: a concealed presentation is much more explicit than complete silence. But Strauss, to exaggerate slightly for increased clarity, attempted to combine concealed presentation with complete silence. That is: he announced publicly the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric tradition, as well as the danger presented to public, political, or everyday order by philosophy and the philosophical nature. But he refused to discuss the fundamental philosophical problems. In this case, one might claim that half a step is worse than no step at all. If philosophy cannot be publicly professed, if the philosopher dare not reveal his deepest nature to the public gaze,

why mention the theme of esotericism at all? Why not restrict oneself to a more or less conventional doctrine of political virtue as rooted in the tradition of natural right?

Strauss's defense, of course, turns upon his understanding of the contemporary plight of philosophy. His exoteric teaching, and so his exoteric presentation of esotericism, was motivated by the desire to produce an environment in which philosophy could survive. Strauss thus believed that philosophy is in danger of disappearing. He regarded philosophy as under attack by the combined forces of modern science and technology, as well as by the extreme egalitarianism of twentieth century liberalism, which erases fundamental distinctions, or replaces wisdom by justice, with the result that it adopts an unjust conception of justice. In other words, he accepted the critique of modernity as formulated by Nietzsche and elaborated by Heidegger. Straussian hermeneutics, with all its talk of the dangers of historicism, the excellences of natural right, and the fundamental soundness of Plato's teaching (whatever that might be), is a response to the same diagnosis of trouble as the Nietzschean and Heideggerean hermeneutics. It is, to be sure, a different response. However, that raises two questions. First: is the danger rightly perceived? Second: which is the right response to the danger?

The theme of this essay is not the nature of the current historical challenge to the existence of philosophy, but what it means to exist philosophically. Although I must make one or two remarks about the first question, I can for the most part assume that the answer is affirmative. The first thing to be said is that we cannot understand any thesis concerning the dangerous circumstances of philosophy by starting with terms like "conservative" or "radical." Whereas philosophers (as distinct from professors of philosophy) are always and necessarily concerned with politics, they never take their fundamental bearings by political doctrines or slogans. A philosopher becomes a conservative or a radical in the political arena on the basis of his assessment of what must be done to preserve philosophy under prevailing conditions. Strauss regularly reminded his students of Nietzsche's wise saying: "advice whispered to the conservative; man is not a crab." Although

he was sometimes perceived as so doing, Strauss never suggested that man can walk backwards. He often seemed to be walking backwards because he did not choose to run along with the crowd. But that in itself has nothing to do with conservatism.

At the same time, I do not wish to deny that Strauss explicitly associated himself with the political right in this country. My only point is that this association represented his judgment as to the best way in which to preserve the distinction between public and private, without which philosophy is impossible. Strauss's political conservatism was as much a part of his exoteric teaching as, say, his friend Alexandre Kojève's Stalinism was a part of Kojève's exoteric response to the need to preserve philosophy. Strauss's best students were no more political conservatives than Kojève's best students were Stalinists. To allude to a closely related question, even allowing for the brief period during which Heidegger was an active member of the Nazi party, it was not true that his best students also became Nazis. Conservatism, Stalinism, and Nazism are of course not all on a par. But each is an extreme solution to an extreme problem. I grant at once that conservatism is far less extreme than either Stalinism or Nazism. But Strauss was precisely a man who concealed extreme steps under a moderate mask. To say that he was himself by nature a moderate man is to miss the point. Philosophy is by its nature, and on Straussian principles, *a revolutionary activity*. The philosopher disobeys the laws and customs of his community as soon as he begins to search for the best laws and customs. Love of the truth, as Strauss always stated, is not the same as love of own.

One other remark needs to be made about whether Strauss was right in believing philosophy to be endangered by contemporary scientism and liberalism. Philosophy is by its nature the pursuit of the truth; it is not allegiance to prevailing fashions or accommodation to urgent contemporary political problems. As soon as the nature of the truth is taken for granted, as soon as the concept of justice is defined in terms of one's local political allegiances or the fashion prevailing among intellectuals, philosophy is dead. The current unrest in the dominant philosophical schools, the increasing

fluidity of doctrinal divisions, the radicalizing of previously rigid views in epistemology, ontology and semantics, are all signs that, without necessarily knowing it, our professional philosophers have granted the truth of Strauss's (and so Kojève's and Heidegger's) diagnosis. We are rapidly returning to the situation of the 1920's, when all three men, Strauss, Kojève and Heidegger, were beginning the task of the public defense of philosophy. There is an atmosphere of doctrinal crisis. However one may feel about the three thinkers just mentioned, or about the plausibility of esotericism, it should be obvious to every serious person that the time has come once more to ask: what is philosophy? And this requires us to ask the correlative question: what or who is the philosopher?

V

However one may assess the contemporary situation, it is plain that Straussian hermeneutics is rooted in the connection between philosophy and politics. How we read a book is not defined by rules and principles of philology and history; but neither is it determined solely or primarily by *phronēsis* in the Aristotelian sense of practical intelligence. It may well be true that a philosophical book is an artful image of everyday life. But how we read that book is not defined by the everyday features of everyday life. We read just as we live: philosophically or non-philosophically. Thus far I have argued that the Platonic dialogue is not an image of Aristotelian everydayness, as Strauss intermittently and inconsistently suggested or implied. I want next to develop the former point by considering the most important feature of Strauss's view of the nature of the Platonic dialogue, as a writing or work of art. We can begin by dismissing two superficial criticisms of Straussian hermeneutics. The first is that Strauss and his students "read into" the text views not explicitly stated by Plato, hence subject to no philological control. I reply: of course they did. What student of Plato does not? To take the most trivial cases: there is no explicit evidence in Plato of historical development, of doctrinal changes on fundamental points. Yet this thesis is widely, almost unanimously held by specialists. Second: there is no evidence in Plato for the assumption that we may disregard the

dramatic form in which he wrote, the intimate presentation of his own thoughts, as mere "literary ornament," to quote a well-known scholar who shall be nameless. Nevertheless, this is exactly the procedure followed by leading "experts" in the field. Third: how can we dare to assign "doctrines" to Plato which are inferred from questions asked by Socrates and answers given by youths, sophists and rhetoricians? Yet scholars have not been modest in stating for us the nature of Plato's teaching, without even remarking upon the fact that Plato says nothing in his own name.

The fact is that, even if Plato had written treatises rather than dialogues, philosophy, as Hegel remarked, is by its nature esoteric. Its deepest thoughts and arguments are not exposed on the surface of books like the patina of fungus that grows on the roofs of intricately constructed mansions. The question in hermeneutics is not *whether* we should read anything into the text. The question is *what* to read into it. Straussian hermeneutics has the minimal virtue that it proceeds from an accurate perception of the nature of the texts it interprets. What Strauss says about these texts may be wrong, but no one who cannot perceive the nature of a dialogue has a right to be heard in criticism of Strauss. So much for the first superficial criticism. I can be even briefer concerning the second. It is sometimes objected that Strauss argued from silence in attributing esoteric views to an author. But this is nonsense. Strauss never argued from silence; he argued from the texts. He often observed that an author could reasonably be expected to have said something which he did not, on the basis of what has already been said. He never interpolated views or procedures into Plato that were foreign to the context, as do those, for example, who extract "arguments" from the dialogues and translate them into the first-order predicate calculus in order to bring out their validity or invalidity.

So much for nonsense. Let us turn now to serious issues. According to Strauss's public hermeneutical pronouncements, the Platonic dialogue is an elaborately coded message containing in some non-coded way the key to its own decipherment. In other words: Plato recognized the danger to the public presented by philosophy, as well as the danger to philosophy represented by the public. But he also

wished to accomplish two things: to ameliorate the public disorder and to assist potential philosophers in their process of education and growth. He therefore thought through two views, one addressed to the public and one to the potential philosophers, but united by their reference to a common theme or set of themes. Having composed these views in his mind, he then constructed the dialogue in the following manner. Every dramatic detail, every act by a character in the play, every metaphor, every phrase, and finally, every word, was selected to play its part in contributing to the concealed presentation of Plato's dual message. The elements of the dialogue would cohere in a public teaching, but to the informed reader, they would be clues to elements in the private teaching. Strauss sometimes enunciated what he called "the principle of logographical necessity." He meant by this that the reader of a Platonic dialogue is to assume the necessity of every word in the text. (I note in passing that the text comes down to us in quite good shape; questions of the accurate reading are relatively infrequent and in any case pose a practical limitation to the task of interpretation, not a motive for changing one's principles of interpretation.)

At this point, an interesting problem arises for Strauss's methodology. Strauss claimed, reasonably enough, that the key to decoding the cryptogram (my term) of the dialogue could not be so concealed that it would be inaccessible to the observant reader. If the key were coded, the entire method would be an exercise in futility. We could, of course, offer our interpretations of the dialogue, but with no possibility of determining which was a correct account of Plato's esoteric teaching. However, it would also be futile to make the key too obvious; this would violate the function of the cryptogram. In practical terms, the only evidence that could be cited to support the claim to have found the key, would be the interpretation itself. But this is obviously circular. Strauss, like Heidegger and all other hermeneuticists, has his version of the hermeneutical circle. The key unlocks the interpretation, but the interpretation justifies the key. Strauss would have accepted this difficulty. He believed, or purported to believe, that the dialogue contained a fully coherent and explicitly statable (but not explicitly stated) teaching or analysis of some theme or set

of themes. Yet he granted that there was no way in which to prove that this or that account of the esoteric message is the right one. What then is the practical difference between Straussian and, say, Heideggerean hermeneutics? Strauss claimed implicitly to have thought Plato's thoughts as Plato himself had formulated them. Yet he had obviously, as all interpreters must, "read into" the dialogue his decipherment of the Platonic message. How could Strauss be sure that he had indeed captured the Platonic teaching, instead of assimilating Plato's puzzles into his own teaching or "world-view"? The argument from coherence is not decisive. It serves only to separate competent from incompetent interpreters. Strauss, in other words, might claim to have explained all the details in a Platonic dialogue. But so might a Heideggerean. In fact, no one has ever explained all the details of a Platonic dialogue, and no one ever will. If this is granted, how then can we know which partial interpretation is on the right track, and which is mistaken?

Even further, how do we know that the cryptogram model is sound? Until the message is decoded, we cannot know; but we cannot decode the message without assuming that there is a message to decode. And suppose that we complete our decipherment, or arrive at a coherent and rational message by the application of Straussian techniques of interpretation. For the sake of definiteness, I give an oversimplified but not irrelevant example of such a message: God does not exist and the soul is mortal. What then? Is the day's work done? Can we store our hermeneutical tools and pass the evening in philosophical symposia? I think not. For now the further question arises: perhaps Plato is still exercising his irony on us. How can we be sure that we have reached the last level of his thinking? If man is at best a lover of wisdom but never wise (assuming this to be an esoteric and not just an exoteric axiom), can there ever be a last level? Or are there not instead deeper and deeper levels? Questions of this sort lead, I suggest, to the following inference. There is no such thing as a correct decoding of a Platonic message. Instead, there is a never-ending process of comparing our readings of Platonic dialogues to our understanding of human experience. It is therefore not the case that the key to a Platonic dialogue is worn on the sleeve

of everyday life. Conversely, if the dialogue is an artful image of the everyday, this is because the key is in fact also concealed, not so much by Plato's conscious intention (like a criminal hiding clues for the detective to find) but by *the nature of things*.

I do not mean to be claiming simply that Plato had a teaching which we shall never be able to determine by public criteria. I am denying the validity of the cryptogram model. We cannot understand Plato without understanding the world mirrored in his dialogues. Every account that we give of the "meaning" of a Platonic text is incomplete, and corresponds to some perspective or another. This is not because the truth is perspectival, or radically historical, but because it always exhibits itself in a determinate manner. I agree with Strauss that we can find the truth within the given determination. But there is no end to the number of determinate appearances of truth. Differently stated, there are *truths*, not *the truth*.

It might be replied to this that truths owe their nature to a timeless and universal structure, or to what Plato calls in his dialogues "the Ideas." However, the dialogues manifestly do not simply present us with a timeless account of this ostensible structure. Given Strauss's doctrine of exotericism, it is far from clear that anything in Plato's esoteric teaching corresponds to the rather vague accounts of the Ideas on the surface of the dialogues. But let this pass, and assume that Plato indeed held a "theory" of Ideas. In this case, we are entitled to cite the account of the vision of the Ideas (called "hyperuranian beings") by the soul in the great myth of the *Phaedrus*. The best souls stand on the roof of the world and are carried around with it, thus catching only a blurred vision of the Ideas from the perspective of the moving world. This comes dangerously close to Heidegger's teaching of the historical presentation of the truth. It is not the same, but neither is it altogether different. The myth evidently says that the best souls all get to the same place from which to view the Ideas, and that this place is directed beyond the world even though contained within it. How we assess the difference between Plato and Heidegger then comes down to this: what is the difference between the blur of cosmic motion and the blur of historicity? I do not believe it is worth taking a stand here on such an obscure point. In fact,

my point is precisely this obscurity: it is not so easy to distinguish Plato from Heidegger.

This has obvious consequences for our assessment of Straussian hermeneutics, which is ostensibly the opposite of Heideggerean hermeneutics. Strauss claimed implicitly or explicitly to be able to think the thoughts of Plato (and others) as they thought and intended them. However, he gives no confirmable evidence of this. In the first place, he restricted himself for the most part to an exoteric presentation of the exoteric teachings of the great thinkers. But in the second place, as soon as we examine whatever is visible of his own esoteric teaching, it is plain that there is no basis for such a claim in the nature of the philosophical activity, at least not as that activity is described by Plato or Strauss. The best we can do is to love wisdom, or to catch blurred glimpses of the Ideas. Even supposing that this was the burden of Plato's secret teaching, it would not be very interesting, and it would not differ from his exoteric teaching. I will admit that it could have dangerous implications for the public order, just as I admit that Plato "muffled" the dangerous consequences of the impossibility of wisdom in his exoteric presentation. But danger is one thing; a complete message about the timeless and universal structure of Being is something else again.

If the dialogue is a cryptogram and an artful image of nature, then nature, and specifically, its everyday surface, must also be a cryptogram. *The everyday must be the exoteric teaching of nature.* But this is not compatible with Strauss's professed view; it goes counter to his thesis of the visibility of philosophy on the surface of things. The image of the cryptogram leads to the prevailing thesis of modern science; everyday experience is our starting-point, but it must be de- and re-constructed in terms of the inner or esoteric truth of nature. This esoteric truth may be written in the language of mathematics, or in some other dialect. Nevertheless, the task of the philosopher is to decipher the cryptogram of nature, and in the process to deviate from, or penetrate beneath, the surfaces of things. The result is the same for scientific theory as it is for Straussian hermeneutics. Since we are required to deconstruct our starting-point in order to reconstruct it theoretically, we lose the very basis or criterion

for distinguishing between sound and unsound reconstructions. Theory becomes indistinguishable from poetry.

Nothing I have said requires us to jettison Strauss's main insight into the distinction between esotericism and exotericism. We must, however, revise his public account of the relation between the two. Above all, we must reject the model of the cryptogram. The great danger of this model is that it leads us to expect an objective "timeless" doctrine which can be grasped exactly as it was formulated, and which is valid at all times. This doctrine is presumably accessible thanks to a mixture of common sense and sound hermeneutical methodology. However, as we pursue the doctrine, we find that it deviates sharply from common sense, that it is not unambiguously accessible to a rule-governed decoding procedure, and that there is no objective criterion by which to verify that we have grasped the doctrine exactly as it was formulated. This entire procedure leads to one of two alternatives: to a dogmatic imposition of a simplistic approximation to the truth, in other words, scholasticism; or else to ironical skepticism. At its best, Strauss's thesis on esotericism leads us to the realization that there is no coded message or answer to our questions. Answerable questions are technical, not philosophical. What we find in the core of a Platonic dialogue is not an answer but a riddle. Beneath the questions are further questions.

Does this lead to an infinite regress, or to perspectivism, or to historical relativism? It very well may. And it certainly will if we insist upon some demonstrable technique for terminating the questions. Strauss knew this very well. He also knew that the truth, if we possess it at all, is a matter of presentiment, prophecy, hunches, intuitions, and a kind of riddling pre-awareness intrinsic to the language of the Platonic dialogue. Nevertheless, he also knew that a doctrine of "recollection" is extremely dangerous and can give rise to mystification as well as radical skepticism. He therefore muffled the implications of the doctrine of "recollection" with an exaggerated account of the truth of the everyday, and the accessibility of that truth in the Platonic cryptogram. In my opinion, the model of the cryptogram is closely connected with the thesis of the gentleman as the accessible copy of the philosopher; it thus sheds light

on Strauss's adherence to the tradition of natural right (*not* natural law, as is sometimes said) and ultimately, on his political conservatism. Whereas philosophy in its true sense is dangerous, Strauss attempted to mute or partly conceal the dangers of philosophy by painting its surface over with a salutary or exoteric teaching.

VI

We may now restate the main principle of Straussian hermeneutics as follows: since philosophy cannot be taught, yet is necessary for the perfection of the human race, we must preserve it in a concealed form. This entails the teaching of an imitation of philosophy. The reader should note that this does not require any falsification of the meaning of texts. This is because Strauss never discussed publicly those texts which were not constructed on the basis of the aforementioned principle. The history of philosophy from Plato to Rousseau is in the main a history of the concealment of the true nature of philosophy. On this point, I entirely agree with Strauss. It is also more than possible that one finds individuals after Rousseau who practice esotericism to one degree or another. This practice occurs wherever intelligent men wish to conceal their motives; and the need to conceal one's motives does not dissolve with the coming of the French Revolution. There is, then, a real sense in which, despite and compatibly with all my criticisms of the cryptogram model, I agree with Strauss's approach to the Platonic dialogues. Up to a point, this model is sound. It enables us to decipher the exoteric presentation of Plato's esoteric teaching. But nothing enables us to decipher the esoteric formulation of Plato's esoteric teaching, because in an important sense *there is no such teaching*. Philosophers must think for, and teach, themselves. Every "philosophical" teaching is thus an exoteric teaching. Those who do not know how to think, or who believe that thinking is identical with the exercise of mathematical logic, or with the formulation of the principles of semantics, will make nothing of this last assertion. That is, they will make nothing of it as professors of philosophy who are wedded to the public thesis that philosophy is semantics, or epistemology, or ontology, or the determination of scientific methodology. However, I risk the following conjecture.

As soon as they exit from their seminar-rooms, and step back into the everyday life from which they emerged as semanticists, ontologists, and methodologists, they become aware of the fragility of their axioms and techniques, and of the discontinuity between human experience and rule-governed behavior. I appeal to their human experience, not because I am a "soft" existentialist or *litterateur*, but in order to invoke in them some consciousness of the rhetorical or political forces which underlie their public adherence to science and mathematical methodologies. The drive to formalization or axiomatization is in response to the fear of intuition, which seems to lead to superstition and dogmatism. Unfortunately, so does the drive to formalization and axiomatization, since both these activities are grounded in intuition.

Philosophy is by its nature esoteric. It is therefore extremely dangerous. The publicization of philosophy gives rise to obscurantism, mystification, dogmatism, and also to profound skepticism and despair. It produces nihilism. In this sense, there is a dimension of agreement between Leo Strauss and Martin Heidegger. Both understood the danger intrinsic to philosophy, however differently each responded to this recognition. This point is so important, that we must restate what is meant by the danger of philosophy. Human existence is characterized by a desire for the truth which can never be satisfied, except in dreams, intuitions, guesses, and the like. Our technical genius, our mastery of nature, and so too our theoretical *constructions*, are all rooted in modes of cognition that resemble prophecy and poetry rather than mathematics and logic. Unfortunately, there are false as well as true prophets. Up to a point, we can distinguish between true and false prophets by the consequences of their doctrines. But we can do so only while remaining at the exoteric level. For in the last and deepest analysis, the truth of a prophecy is visible only to another prophet. The underlying motive of the Enlightenment, and hence of modern scientific rationalism, is to eliminate the danger of the false prophet by substituting publicly verifiable criteria for reason and madness, if not quite for truth and falsehood. Unfortunately, this substitution is itself justified by a prophecy. We are thus asked to reject false prophets on the basis

of a prophetic assurance concerning the truth. The new prophecy, of course, "works" in the sense that it solves problems, proves theorems, builds bridges, cures diseases, and constructs space-ships. It can do these things on the basis of an extraordinarily powerful understanding of the workings of "nature" in the sense of matter, extension, force, or whatever is the now fashionable term. At a certain point, however, questions arise. What counts as significant work? Which desires ought to be satisfied? Are all human problems amenable of resolution? What is the actual theoretical justification for our theoretical reconstructions of everyday life?

The difficulty is compounded by the fact that science does not cease to work as it becomes increasingly self-conscious. Diseases are still being cured. Space-ships are still being constructed. And no doubt our penetration into the secrets of matter grows ever deeper. The confusions elicited by deep theoretical doubts as to the validity of the scientific prophecy, or differently stated, as to the scientific nature of what is in fact a prophecy, simply add to our determination to suppress as irrational these same confusions. We celebrate our technical genius in a way not dissimilar to the worship by savages of totem-figures. The appearance of each new child-prodigy logician or mathematician is taken as a sign from heaven that the scientific prophecy has been confirmed. However, the fundamental problems or questions of philosophy remain unanswered. Skepticism grows; life-long priests of the scientific religion close their careers with doctrines of world-creation, physiological behaviorism, and even surrealism. This attempt by a generation of highly intelligent individuals to maintain simultaneously two conflicting, even mutually exclusive, personalities, without admitting that any problem exists, can only be called by its right name: schizophrenia.

So much for the danger of philosophy. Does it follow that we ought to reject science? Of course not, any more than it follows that we ought to reject the tradition of natural right. What we now require, I suggest, is a public debate, among all interested parties, on what is best for philosophy. I do not say: on what is best for the public health. This second question can only be answered after we have come to some determination of the first question. And this is

my major disagreement with Leo Strauss. We are no longer living at a time in which philosophy may be saved by recourse to traditional exoteric devices. Putting to one side the truth, beauty, or utility of science and mathematics, the modern rhetorical justification of an essentially scientific philosophy is itself an exoteric device, and one which, despite its continued power, is not working. But it cannot be made to work by a salutary injection of Straussianism. Loyalty to, and respect for, a great teacher must not be permitted to obscure my own sense of how to respond to the danger now faced by philosophy. On this point, I am in agreement with the *esoteric* teaching of Nietzsche and Heidegger. Philosophy can survive today only by stating publicly its dangerous nature. This will bring it initial ridicule. The semanticists, ontologists, and methodologists will sneer ironically about melodramatic posturing and technical incompetence. But, as I noted above, underneath these sneers is a suppressed anxiety.

I hope it is clear that I have not been attacking traditional philology or the possibility of an "objective" reading of philosophical texts. In my opinion, the Heideggerean hermeneuticists have exaggerated the difficulty of understanding someone else's thoughts, whether the thoughts of our contemporaries or of a long past epoch. At the risk of seeming impertinent, I must say that it is no more difficult to understand Heidegger, Wittgenstein, or Frege than it is to understand Plato and Aristotle. No more and no less: as we penetrate from one level of significance to the next, as we move deeper and deeper into the text, we pass beyond the text to the world it mirrors. We pass from philology to philosophy. The difficulty of understanding arises, not from the text, but from the themes of the text. My disagreement with Nietzsche and Heidegger, or more immediately, with Derrida and his associates, does not concern the openness of the text or the need to explore new routes. The need to explore new routes is possible only if those routes are thinkable by all competent individuals, regardless of their historical domiciles. And we can take these routes only if they are *present*. Differently stated, Derrida's "Heideggerean" experimentalism in thought is not compatible with his elevation of the text to a status prior to speech.

Neither is it compatible with the priority of presence to absence. *Absence must itself be present to us, or in us, in order for us to be fecundated by it.*

It is certainly not the case that every interpretation of a text must be explicitly guided by the deepest formulation of the nature of philosophy. Esotericism is the concern with the extreme case: the first and last things. But between the first and the last things are the middle cases, and here, moderation is appropriate, if by "moderation" we mean a sensible application of philosophical eschatology. The present essay, however, has addressed itself to the inner nature of Straussian hermeneutics, not out of any contingent interest in a man named Leo Strauss, but out of interest in the philosophical foundation of hermeneutics. The deepest axiom of Straussian hermeneutics is: *be wise*. In view of the difficulties which I have identified with Strauss's exoteric teaching, it is now necessary to state publicly a view which I have good reason to believe was held by Strauss: in the domain of philosophical eschatology, as distinct from technical or surface issues, the truth is whatever the wisest man of the age says it is. There can be no doubt that this axiom raises the critical danger of the false prophet. For this reason, Strauss himself never enunciated it publicly. Danger apart, however, I call attention to the similarity between this axiom and the Heideggerean doctrine of the epochal *Seinsgeschick*, or revelation-via-concealment of Being, in and through the thoughts of the greatest thinkers of the ages.

VII

The task of the philosopher in each age is not to promulgate a philosophical teaching, but to contribute to the preservation of philosophy. If a philosopher promulgates a teaching, he does so for this purpose; and in this sense, the teaching, whether technically sophisticated or naive, is exoteric. Strauss's response to the contemporary dangers facing philosophy was to construct an exoteric teaching from two disparate elements. The first element was a veiled revelation of the true nature and dangerousness for the public of the philosopher. The philosopher, to repeat, transgresses law and custom, not simply in his thoughts, but publicly, by virtue of the activity

of philosophizing (as opposed to engaging in publicly acceptable ideologies). The second element was the already described conflation of the Platonic and Aristotelian doctrines of human nature and everyday life. Like Nietzsche and Heidegger before him, Strauss did not want the true nature of philosophy to disappear altogether from the public view, since this would have deprived potential philosophers of a crucial stimulus and guide. Unlike Nietzsche and Heidegger, Strauss did not wish to be fully explicit concerning the nature of philosophy, because he did not wish to endanger the public order, or to attract, and thus to corrupt, those who might love philosophy but lacked the prerequisites for pursuing her.

We can better understand the dangers of a public revelation of philosophy by a brief consideration of the political behavior of Martin Heidegger and Alexandre Kojève. Under what circumstances, if any, is the philosopher justified in coming to the public support of a tyrant? In classical antiquity, philosophers were condemned for seeking the favors of tyrants. It has perhaps been forgotten, thanks to contemporary ideologies, that the history of political philosophy from its beginnings in Homer ("the rule of many is not good; let there be one king") has been for the most part, at least through Hegel, but with important exceptions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an advocacy of extreme conservatism. There is no doubt more than one reason for this. I limit myself to stating what should be obvious: if one becomes the counselor or prime minister of a tyrant, one is able to mitigate his policies in such a way as to protect philosophy. However, there are different kinds of tyrants, and no single generalization covers all the cases, other than the generalization that it is better to interpret power than to be interpreted by it. If, of course, one associates with a tyrant for base motives, one becomes merely tyrannical and base. But it is not impossible to conceive of circumstances in which the motives for supporting a tyrant might be just, if not noble. (The difference between justice and nobility is that acts which we are compelled to do for good reasons, yet which are ugly in themselves, may be just but not noble.)

In what follows, I make no apologies for the political acts, or speeches, of Martin Heidegger and Alexandre Kojève. Instead, I am

asking the reader to think about a serious problem. It is well-known that Heidegger became a Nazi for however short a time, during which he used his great authority to identify the pronouncements of Hitler with the latest historical revelation of the truth. Heidegger's closest students have assured me that he did so out of political naïveté. I have heard on more than one occasion that his wife, whose father was a Nazi general, forced him to join the party. I am afraid that Heidegger's own disciples do not appreciate the intrinsic absurdity of such a justification for the political act of a philosopher. Can anyone imagine Plato's wife (or lover) forcing him to join the Thirty Tyrants in Athens? If Heidegger was politically naive, then we are led to wonder how adequate was his understanding of human nature, and hence of the nature of the philosophical existence.

I personally prefer Heidegger's own explanation of his political association with the Nazis. He claimed to take this step from the desire to use his authority as Rector of Freiburg to mitigate the evil consequences of Nazism for philosophical and scientific investigation. When he saw that this was not possible, as he told it, he resigned his post and party membership. Let me repeat: in this context, I neither condemn nor excuse Heidegger. I say merely that it is theoretically plausible for a philosopher to join the party of a tyrant for decent, and even for philosophical, motives. If it is absurd and evil to identify the speeches of the Führer with the revelation of Being, what shall we say of a philosopher who identified the acts of Stalin with the last historical manifestation of Absolute Spirit? This was done by Leo Strauss's friend, my friend and teacher, Alexandre Kojève. Strauss, who bowed to no one in his detestation of the Nazis, almost certainly regarded communism as an even greater menace to philosophy and political health. Yet, whereas he took me one day into his private office, grasped my hand, and made me swear that I would never enter into personal relations of any kind with Heidegger, he did so during the same circumstances in which he was sending me, with his blessings, to study with Kojève. How is this to be understood? Certainly not on the basis of Strauss's and my Jewish origins. It is at least an open question as to who was the more effective anti-Semite, Stalin or Hitler, or which of

these monsters was responsible for the slaughter of more millions, whether Jewish or not. Kojève was the least naive man I have ever known (although he was occasionally frivolous, an attribute which the naive mistake for naïveté). The thought of any lover persuading him to become a Stalinist is so ludicrous, to those who knew him, that it has only to be mentioned to be rejected. Furthermore, Kojève was publicly advocating Stalinism, not merely in the thirties and forties, but continued to do so in the fifties and sixties, when it was no longer possible to mistake his conduct as a surrender to fashion. In order to understand the behavior of Heidegger and Kojève, and thus finally to understand the nature of the philosophical life, and *a fortiori* the nature of philosophical hermeneutics, it is necessary to take that behavior seriously. This does not require that we become Nazis or Stalinists. It requires us to ask whether Heidegger and Kojève made a philosophical error in their political allegiances, rather than expressing a defect of character. In so doing, however, we have to face up to the co-ordinate question. What if they made no error at all, but were correct in their actions? What if they did the wise thing under the circumstances?

I repeat: this is not my view. I think that both were quite mistaken in their political behavior. But this is a judgment of the specific circumstances; it is not a rejection of the possibility that philosophers might have to join hands with tyrants under quite different circumstances. Let us briefly consider Kojève's justification for his support of Stalinism. To say that he was a Hegelian is to say less than nothing. It is not a simple task to understand Hegel; something more is required than to pronounce his name. But Kojève was not a Hegelian; he was a Kojévian. Less obliquely, his complex argument may be expressed with maximum concision, and without distorting the main issue. Kojève was simply carrying to its logical conclusion the actual political implications of the Enlightenment. It is popularly believed that Enlightenment leads to democracy and freedom of the individual. Kojève saw much deeper than that. To turn on the lights is to extinguish the darkness. Once the truth is known, it must drive out error, and this can be accomplished only by the assumption of universal political power. In Hegel's striking expression,

history is a slaughter-bench. If 20,000,000 Kulaks must die in order to actualize the Absolute, so much the worse for them. Once we achieve the universal homogeneous world-state, grounded in and expressive of the true teaching of Alexandre Kojève, wars will no longer be possible. The number of lives that will be saved by the initial slaughter of dissenters will be far in excess of 20,000,000. Consider the possibility, even the probability, that the human race will destroy itself entirely as a consequence of the Cold War and the arms race. The universal homogeneous world-state will make this impossible. And it will do so by enacting the one true teaching, or by unifying theory and practice.

It would be easy enough to avoid thinking about this by dismissing Kojève as a frivolous Parisian café-philosopher. By the same token, we could settle the question of Heidegger's Nazi period by dismissing him as a vulgar and mean-spirited German peasant. These judgments might contain some truth, and still be irrelevant to the issue. In the case of Kojève, I want to say only that his justification of Stalinism is in principle no different from contemporary fashionable liberalism. The difference lies in this: Kojève was a powerful and merciless thinker, whereas contemporary liberals are not strong enough to carry out the implications of their own principles. I add immediately that, in a political sense, we are better off with the liberals than with Kojève. But this is just to say once more that philosophy is politically dangerous. I myself do not take with any degree of seriousness whatsoever professors at fashionable universities who publicly promulgate doctrines of absolute egalitarianism, while excluding from their precincts all those who lack their ideological pedigree. A lackey is a lackey, regardless of the number of badges he wears. The philosophical value of Kojève's political extremism is that it forces us to think, and thus to learn something important about political life, not to mention philosophy.

The political problem is this: which is more dangerous, an intellectual climate dominated by lackeys, or one in which philosophers make public revelations about the nature of philosophy? Strauss would almost certainly reply that, in the latter case, the result will

simply be once again a regime of lackeys, now called disciples of the philosophers, or even worse, original thinkers in their own right. I will restate this point in terms of Strauss's criticism of Nietzsche. According to Strauss (and he was not alone in this), we live at a time which has been largely defined, in its deepest and broadest contours, by the revolutionary doctrines of Nietzsche. Thanks to Nietzsche, the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric has become, not merely public, but so to say a lounge in every street-corner and public cafe. Nietzsche's aristocratic revolution, designed to produce conditions under which the superior person might exist in public, has instead produced a public of individuals, each of whom regards himself to be a superior person. As a consequence, philosophy is in danger of disappearing, not through public persecution, but through public acceptance. Thus far, I can perhaps agree with Strauss.

However, Strauss draws an inference from his analysis of the contemporary scene which I cannot accept. In a strange and somewhat depressing sense, Leo Strauss, representative of the Platonic aristocracy, and hence of the Nietzschean elite, comes to terms with the *demos*. Strauss attempts to cover over the abyss opened by Nietzsche, and so too by Heidegger and Kojève, by calling us back to common sense and sobriety, to the publicly perceived distinction between the noble and the base, to the virtues of patriotism and tradition. It is missing the point to call this conservatism. The fact is that Strauss waters down aristocratic conservatism by an exoteric accommodation to the conservatism of the *demos*. A Straussian might object that Strauss preferred the countryman to the city-dweller, but this is hair-splitting. Strauss's ironical advocacy of the virtues of Sparta was, it is true, an imitation of Platonic irony. But the circumstances of our time are no longer those of classical Greece.

Leo Strauss set himself a complex and honorable goal which, whether we agree or disagree with his methods of achieving it, deserves our highest praise. He wished to preserve the well-being of philosophy, and at the same time to advocate a politically salutary public doctrine. I have now stated in sufficient detail why I think his effort was incoherent. The method Strauss chose to preserve

philosophy was to suppress it in the very act of calling attention to it. But this sober suppression of the Nietzschean revelation is one hundred years too late. We have paid a price for Nietzsche's violent subtlety, and there is no court to reimburse us. What is now required is an open discussion of the nature and hence the dangers of philosophy. *We no longer need to conceal the skeptical or nihilistic possibilities arising from a misuse of philosophy because we already live in a skeptical and nihilistic age.* If the potential philosopher is to be preserved from corruption, it will not be by a courtly revival of natural right and sobriety.

CHAPTER THREE

Thales: The Beginning of Philosophy

*tous anthrōpous...dia touto apollusthai, hoti
ou dunantai tēn archēn tōi telei prosapsai*
Alcmaeon fr. 2 (Diels)

I.

The problem of the origin of philosophy is implicit in each endeavor to understand what philosophy *is*. We cannot distinguish philosophy from non-philosophy without *defining* or thinking philosophy through its form, without following the boundary whereby philosophy is differentiated from other intellectual activities; and therefore, in reflecting seriously upon the origin of philosophy, we have begun to philosophize. A philosophical beginning, considered as a specific kind of human activity, rather than as the acceptance of a position or doctrine, necessarily reproduces or repeats the origin of philosophy at least in the sense that each such beginning, however unique as a historical phenomenon, is a species of a given genus. Thus the (philosophical) consideration of philosophical beginnings would seem to be the proper mode for investigating, not just the nature of philosophy, but its historical origin as well: that is, in what sense philosophy may be said to have a "historical" origin (for it may be that "history" originates within philosophy). This procedure seems more reasonable than an effort to determine by historical methods the identity of the actually first philosopher, whether Thales or some other man. For if each new philosophical beginning is literally *new*, if, say, the philosophical beginning of Hegel is radically separate from the philosophical beginning of Thales, then there is no such thing as philosophy, no such thing as the self-identical form of man's expression of his love of wisdom, existing within and independently of historical accumulation and transformation.¹ Since no one could maintain such a thesis without presenting a philosophical

theory of the origin(s) of philosophy, a thesis as to what philosophy *is* (and is not), it seems reasonable to suggest that the questions of the origin and nature of philosophy are at bottom one.

Furthermore, the problem of the origin and nature of philosophy seems to be inseparable from the problem of the nature (and perhaps the origin as well) of history. We cannot discuss intelligently what we mean by the *origin* of philosophy unless we possess some clarity about the origin of psychic (human) activity as such. If the origin of philosophy occurs *within* history, as in some sense seems necessary, we are forced to consider whether that origin is radically historical (or temporal), or distinguishable from history and, in some sense, perhaps from time as well. For even if we believe that philosophy is nothing more than the generalized expression of a historical attitude or *Weltanschauung*, we must explain in some detail our historicist interpretation of philosophy (or, our philosophical interpretation of history). We cannot "do" philosophy (as historicists now put it) unless we know what we are doing; otherwise, we could never be sure that we were not in fact doing something *else*, and we would not be in a position to condemn with such conviction other ways of "doing" philosophy. Philosophy, especially if it is the clarification of language (to refer again to contemporary historicism), must surely be required to be clear about its own language, and, most fundamentally, about the word with which it is itself designated. Consequently, it must be able to explain in some detail how it is possible for philosophical language, and so, for philosophical activity or "analysis," to be at once a generalized version of local historical usage, and so, to one degree or another, transient;² and at the same time the instrument whereby history, in the form of linguistic usages, is sorted into the proper categories. Finally, it must explain in what sense there can be *proper* categories of that which is throughout historical, and which is considered from the viewpoint of the thoroughly historical.

For these reasons, the problem of the origin of philosophy is not at bottom a "scholarly" one. Or rather, the scholarly approach to the problem is itself already philosophical. To give one important example: F. M. Cornford claimed that philosophy originated in a

gradual evolution of religious mythology, whereas Karl Reinhardt denies such an interpretation altogether, and considers philosophy proper to begin in logical or metaphysical speculation.³ By what criteria are we to choose between these rival accounts? Even were we to duplicate the professional attainments of these men, we should have performed only an external act. At the critical moment, we should have to say, "I have studied the evidence as fully and as fairly as possible; I have tried to see what Thales said as it was meant, and I take it to demonstrate the following . . ." At this moment, we act not as scholars, but as philosophers. In other words: the origin of philosophy cannot be "scientifically" documented, because what counts as evidence depends upon the philosophical assumptions governing our conception of scientific scholarship. But let us assume that the evidence *had* been scientifically gathered, and agreed to be evidence. We should still have to understand it, and there is no neutral point, external to philosophy, upon which the "objective" investigator may build the foundations of philosophy itself.

We cannot, for example, say: Thales was the first philosopher, and he speaks a modified version of religious language; therefore, Cornford is right, and Reinhardt is wrong. We should first be required to answer at least two questions: (1) how do we know that Thales *is* a philosopher? (2) how can we demonstrate that the religious language used by Thales was intended by him to be understood in a religious sense? The answer to the first question manifestly depends upon our philosophical understanding, upon what we understand philosophy to be. It cannot be answered by scholarly evidence because it is not a question of scholarship. Consequently, "orthodox" opinions about the philosophical significance of scholarly evidence are no more compelling than the philosophical arguments upon which these opinions are based.⁴ It is sad but true that we can never know whether Thales was a philosopher unless we ourselves are philosophers. If we place our trust in the traditional agreement upon his status, we are behaving in a manner just the opposite of philosophers as the traditional account prescribes them, men who examined tradition or put it to the torture. If on the other hand it is self-evident that Thales was a philosopher,

one may say that philosophy is itself unnecessary because that which is self-evident is not in need of rational investigation. But the character of Thales' remarks could hardly be said to be self-evident, unless we mean by "self-evident" the findings of common-sense, or of modern science, in either of which cases, his words (if they are his words) are self-evidently untrue. If by this criterion it is self-evident that Thales is *not* a philosopher, one requires a demonstration or defense of the viewpoint from which he is so condemned, and this brings us back into philosophy.

As for the second question: the orthodox or conventional method of deciding whether a man is religious consists in asking him, if he is accessible to direct questioning, or in reading his books if he is not, or in studying reports of the man's views if he wrote no books or they have been lost in time. It should be easy to see that this conventional procedure possesses no philosophical status whatsoever. To begin with, men may lie, and have often done so. They may lie for compelling social and political reasons, or from pride, or even from mere playfulness. This possibility has been stated publicly throughout antiquity, and even before the time of Thales; it suffices to mention the wily Odysseus. Plato and Cicero among the ancients discussed the ambiguous status of religious professions by the wise men of the past, and the theme has been much discussed throughout the history of European thought.⁵ But apart from the possibility of lying, which may strike some as frivolous, let us consider the point raised by Reinhardt in his work on Parmenides. Reinhardt reasonably reminds us that, at the beginning of philosophy, there could not have existed a previously developed set of technical philosophical terms.⁶ Therefore the first philosophers were forced to make use of available language to express their meaning. Since religious language was normally employed to speak of exalted matters, they understandably used religious words, albeit in a new sense, for their own purposes. Reinhardt continues by showing how the context in which these terms are employed rules out the possibility that they possess an orthodox, or even a religious sense. He is primarily concerned with Parmenides, but why can we not adopt his suggestion in the case of Thales (or anyone else)?

If we reject this suggestion, and argue that the speech of Thales and the other pre-Socratics is just like that of modern savages, or of primitive people who are just emerging from a condition of totally mythical belief, then we are asserting a *philosophical* rather than a scholarly or scientific view. We mean to assert that, regardless of the identity of the first philosopher, he must have spoken like Thales, and Thales' speech is like that of the cited primitives, a development from religion to philosophy. It should at least be mentioned that this hypothesis can *never* be empirically confirmed, and is therefore scientifically worthless. In the first place, the superstitions of modern primitives do not "congeal" into philosophy by themselves; if any "primitives" go on to become philosophers, it is by leaving their tribes and studying at universities staffed by men who have already been formed by the prior emergence of philosophy. Nevertheless, philosophy must have begun prior to the existence of universities, so let us assume that a savage in some primitive tribe now accessible to us, suddenly became a philosopher, entirely unassisted by outsiders. How could we prove that what he had done was merely to develop, step by step, the superstitions of his tribe? Exactly the same problems would arise as have already been mentioned. We might ask him (perhaps in the form of a questionnaire submitted by a team of sociologists), but he in turn might be as scornful of our ignorance as Francis Bacon, among others, tells us that the ancient philosophers were. Or he might share Socrates' views on the utility of noble lies, or the belief of Odysseus that one's speech should be relative to the kind of man one is addressing, or Spinoza's conviction on the advisability of speaking *ad captum vulgi*. We should once more be thrown back onto our philosophical understanding of philosophy.

It is in this vein that I ask the reader to consider the following reflections upon Thales. Thales, whoever he may actually have been, is for us philosophy, making its appearance in human history. The question of the historical accuracy of the opinions and sayings attributed to him is in one sense unanswerable. What I should rather wish to do is to justify this attribution by discussing the philosophical content of the fragments attributed to Thales. I believe that this

content is accessible to us, despite the ambiguities, the encrustations of history, and the reason for this belief is my understanding of the nature of philosophy. Thus, a complete interpretation of Thales' alleged sayings would be identical with a complete philosophical speech, even if they were in themselves incomplete, provided only that they were indeed philosophical. Philosophy, if it is an activity distinguishable from others, with a form and so an essential nature, must originate essentially (as distinguished from accidentally or historically) for each of us as it did for Thales. I shall therefore restrict my interpretation to the problem of the necessary conditions which make possible the origin of philosophy. That is, I shall try to suggest how the sayings of Thales explain themselves by explaining the possibility of philosophical speech. This is to say that, in one sense, the sayings are self-explanatory; that is, they are, as reproducible by us in our own thinking, essentially intelligible apart from their original historical context. If this is so, the question at once arises why we should read Thales at all, and not rather simply ourselves; for this reason, my interpretation must begin with a defense of the study of history.

II. The Desedimentation of Philosophy⁷

It is sometimes the case, and especially since Descartes, that men turn away from history and "*l'étude des lettres . . . me résolvant de ne chercher plus d'autre science, que celle qui se pourrait trouver en moi-même, ou bien dans le grand livre du monde,*" to discover philosophy within themselves.⁸ It might seem to some that they are thereby following the example of Thales by turning directly toward ideas, questions, and answers in their eternal purity, rather than in their historically encumbered form. And so, in addition to the excitement aroused by the notion that one may himself originate philosophy, it seems that the first philosophers live again in the return of the modern thinkers to the self. Of course, the self in question must be something more than the sum of one's personal history. But even if the self is transformed into the transcendental ego or absolute *Geist*, the danger arises that such a transcendental or absolute structure may be historically modified, perhaps be even

a historical construction. For our view of the structure of the self is extracted from self-introspection, and do not selves present themselves to themselves as historical crystallizations, as *results* of the forces of time? We must ask how it is possible to grasp a self whose structure permits the presentation within it of eternal ideas, of a structure which underlies, but is sedimented over by, history. And so we must decide whether "the origin of philosophy within the self" means the discovery by each self of the *same* philosophical origin, or rather the "original" creation by each self (as a new moment of history) of a fundamentally new philosophy. How, for example, can one recognize the origin of philosophy within one's *own* experience? Is not the experience of the individual a microcosm of human history, with the same ambiguities and contradictions that serve as obstacles to precise identifications? Entirely apart from the difficulty of locating the self, who of us could dare to say, after an honest assessment of his own experience: "for me, philosophy began with event X or condition Y at age Z." And is such an "honest" assessment of our experience even possible? Do we not carry it through in the distorted light of our already past, and so determined, experience? Is not our view of our own past therefore *obscured* by its progressive accumulation or sedimentation? The moment we begin to wonder about the origin of philosophy, have we not already become alienated from this origin by the relativism of historical experience?

In view of these objections, it has often been suggested that a theory about the "origin" of philosophy is nothing more than a conjecture about history, with the added inconvenience that the theory is about one's *own* history, about the history of which we have the least possible perspective or "objectivity," about which we are most certain to be biased. If we nevertheless insist that philosophy originates in a specific way, which is elaborated by us as individual philosophers, we find that there is a wide variety of such theories, and that the variety is characterized, not simply by disagreement, but by contradiction as well. If we say that all these theories are correct (or irrefutable), we say in effect that philosophy has *no* origin because it originates everywhere and in every way: this is to say that its origin is *ex nihilo*, since "everything" is obviously "nothing."

Contemporary "sophisticated" relativism, which takes for granted the impossibility of establishing the relative satisfactoriness of philosophical positions, or, more radically, of conceptions of philosophy, terminates in the conclusion that Being, which is defined by our philosophical language, is Nothing.

In order, on the other hand, to substantiate our *own* theory, we should have to refute those who contradict us. Each contradictor represents a historical generation, and each generation mirrors the confusion of history as a whole. We face the same problem: we should have to know what philosophy *is*, which is to say that we should have to know our *own* history. Is not our own history, despite the illusions of propinquity, considerably more *obscure* than human history? What else did Thales mean when, in reply to the question, "what is hardest of all?" he answered, "to know thyself." And when the Platonic Socrates, in obedience to this maxim, advises us to study the psyche by way of its more easily visible paradigm, the *polis*, have we understood anything if we dismiss his words as a "fallacy of composition?"

Perhaps the most usual counter-objection to the difficulties just sketched would be something like this: I agree that knowledge with respect to the origin of philosophy is included within knowledge of what philosophy is. I further agree that I am circumscribed by my own experience, and that this raises difficulties of perspective. But philosophy is in fact nothing more nor less than the thoroughgoing attempt by the individual to understand his own experience, and whatever that experience touches upon or implies. On the basis of this attempt, each philosopher arrives at a decision concerning the origin of philosophy which he must defend against opposing decisions as best he may, i.e. on the basis of how he understands his experience, of himself and of others, and so, of how he understands, not merely his own decision, but the reasons or experiences of others, whereby they are led to reject his decision. What more could any man do?

On the face of it, this objection seems eminently sane. The problem lies in understanding more precisely what it means. Has it not merely accepted our earlier diagnosis of the issue of origin? We have now been told that the decision with respect to the origin of

philosophy not only faces the difficulties which were previously raised, but is intrinsically impossible to make, because it depends upon a never-ending attempt to certify the soundness of our understanding of experience. We are like hoops rolling through history, with each hoop itself a micro-history, obsessed with questions of origins which cannot be found because of the circularity of our obsession. To ask: how does philosophy originate? is to ask: what is philosophy? If we do not know what philosophy is, we cannot specify its origin. If knowledge of what philosophy is, depends upon a sound understanding of our experience, then we are perpetually immobilized by problems of historical interpretation. If philosophy is just this perpetual immobilization, then again, *it has no origin*, except perhaps in so far as consciousness deteriorates into self-consciousness. Then philosophy is just the decay of non-Being into the Becoming of Being. It is the bracketing of the "non" by a progressively more paranoid historicism. That is to say, there is no such thing as philosophy except in the sense of helplessly self-critical opinion. But why is one opinion better than another? Again, a matter of opinion. *De confirmatione non disputandum est.*

If man is radically historical, then self-understanding is historically conditioned understanding of history. In this perspective, the original objection against the relevance of the historical investigation of the first philosopher is a historical error. The definition of the self can only be accomplished by establishing the perimeter of the self's history, that is, by the invocation and articulation of the historical continuum within which the self emerges, and through which its experience is illuminated and obscured. In this case, the statements of the first philosopher, say Thales, are of particular relevance to our own statements about philosophy. Indeed, they are even *more* relevant to the question of the origin of philosophy than are our own statements about that question, inasmuch as it is precisely the statements of Thales which originate the philosophical mode of historical existence. We exist philosophically as relative to Thales. We see the world from the perspective illuminated by Thales' vision: Thales' vision is the origin, not just of philosophy, but of the world which we see, and so of us as philosophical selves.

Suppose, however, that man is *not* radically historical. If the roots of the self are embedded in an eternal order, in an ahistorical ground of history, then self-discovery depends upon a perception or grasping of, which is also a standing upon, this ground. Such a discovery requires a movement away from history, a moving through history to its conditions. But if the self is the theater of philosophy, then the movement is also toward the origin of philosophy. As independent of historical modifications, the origin of philosophy is *ex nihilo*; its source is timeless, without location, always accessible to man just because it is nowhere, *outopios*, utopian, ideal. Thales, therefore, makes manifest this origin *ex nihilo* better than any subsequent philosopher, because in him the origin is less obscured by historical sedimentation. That is, the obscurity of Thales is not historical, but entirely philosophical. In order, however, to rid ourselves of the detritus of history, we must master it; we cannot return to the pure obscurity of Thales without recovering him from impure obscurity. And, since we are ourselves determined by history, such a recovery cannot be accomplished merely from our individual resources. We must think our way to the conditions of the self by thinking our way back to Thales. The accuracy of self-knowledge must be confirmed by an understanding of Thales.

III. The Discovery of Nouns

Diogenes Laertius records the views attributed to Thales by tradition; they may be summarized as follows:¹⁰

1. According to some, he was the first to call the soul deathless.
2. Some say that he was the first to speak of *physis*.
3. He established water as the beginning of everything, and made the cosmos ensouled (*empsychon*) and full of daimons.
4. *Nous* is quickest of all things, for it runs through everything.
5. He said that there is no difference between life and death.
6. When asked, "what is the most difficult of all things?" he replied, "to know thyself."

If we interpret Thales either as a primitive mythologist or as a primitive physicist, it is immediately apparent that the notions attributed to him possess little if any *philosophical* significance,

unless we assume (as most modern men, following Descartes, would do) that philosophy begins with the discovery of physics, although this discovery is initially couched in mythical terms.¹¹

Even then, of course, Thales would have only minimal substantive importance for philosophy. However this may be, philosophy is, under this assumption, if not physics itself, what we may call "meta-physics" (to be distinguished by the hyphen from what is traditionally known as metaphysics) or speech *about* physics. But speech about physics must have a foundation which is not merely physical, for the simple reason that matter is itself mute: electrical charges, for instance, *qua* electrical charges, are unable to measure themselves and speak of the results. Meta-physics is based upon a monist materialism which cannot account for its own speech. The relationship between physics and meta-physics depends upon a *metaphysical* structure within which matter and speech find their place: their possibility and their intelligibility. The speech about metaphysical structure is not the same as meta-physical speech, and the difference between these two kinds of speech is recognized (if not understood) by those who themselves speak of the "mythical" character of what Thales said. But the conception of "myth" here employed is itself determined by the acceptance of scientific or meta-physical speech; in referring to the "mythic" elements in Thales' speech, such an interpretation refers to the imperfectly or partially *scientific* character of his speech.¹² That is, the "mythic" element represents the incursion of ignorance into a recognition of the road to knowledge, if not of knowledge itself. Therefore, in so far as Thales speaks "mythically," he is speaking *nonsense* (since attempts to interpret this nonsense make use of concepts themselves derived from the scientific conception of significant thought). Mythical speech is therefore speech about nothing, and the transition from mythical to scientific-philosophical speech is a transition to a speech about something.

On this view, to talk about the mythical component in Thales' speech is just a polite way of referring to his ignorance. To the extent that he is *not* ignorant, he is assumed to be speaking meta-physically or scientifically. But meta-physical mythology

cannot explain the *difference* between knowledge and ignorance which it purports to discover. Assuming that Thales is really a physicist¹³ (or a meta-physicist), the difference between his (physical) knowledge and (mythical) ignorance cannot be explained in terms of the physical structure which his meta-physical speech attempts to describe. The correspondence between meta-physical speech and physical structure can only be measured from a third point, or rather from a third structure which encompasses the two, and is therefore a *superstructure*. Knowledge is not explained by ignorance, nor ignorance by knowledge. But the two are explained by an understanding of their difference, and the understanding of their difference lies in the recognition that the *condition* for the possibility and intelligibility of each is the superstructure encompassing the two. In other terms, the difference between knowledge and ignorance is that between a positive and negative quality. If there were nothing else, the positive and the negative would cancel each other out, or in effect the negative would negate the positive. The presence of different qualities is proof of the reality of their difference, and so of the "difference" between them and it. The recognition of the reality of the difference is the origin of philosophy as the recognition of the accessibility of the superstructure within which knowledge and ignorance themselves become evident.¹⁴

If the "mythological" interpretation of Thales is correct, then, he is certainly not a philosopher. For we may certainly say that philosophy, as the love of wisdom, *cannot* be present where there is no recognition of that which makes such a love possible (namely, the recognition of the difference between knowledge and ignorance). Such a recognition is *ex nihilo* in an ordinary, even common-sensical understanding of instantaneous illumination. One does not see that one is beginning to see: when we begin to see, at any moment of this "beginning," we *are* seeing. So we cannot recognize the reality of the difference between seeing and not-seeing, between knowledge and ignorance, by stages or degrees; in order to recognize this difference, one must *already* know it. In order to see its "origin," one must be able to see, *one must be seeing*. The mythological interpretation is in any case at bottom identical with the interpretation of Thales

as a physicist or a meta-physicist. The "mythologist" assumes the emergence of philosophy from superstition or religion to be a partial repudiation of mythical in favor of physical speech, because he is at bottom convinced of the identity between philosophy and meta-physics. Whether or not the ostensibly "mythical" elements in Thales' speech are really mythical elements, depends, in effect, upon whether he is speaking, or attempting to speak, as a meta-physician rather than as a metaphysician. Thales is considered to be by intention a meta-physicist because of Aristotle's somewhat professorial remarks (which seem to reveal his lack of interest in Thales) on Thales' image of water. But if Thales understands water in the "physical" sense as the term is used by modern scientists (although not by Aristotle), what are we to make of his speech about souls? If the speech about souls is just myth, then Thales is not a philosopher. The question is whether Thales is using mythical terms in a new, philosophical sense (analogous to the procedure which Reinhardt attributes to Parmenides), and so, in consequence, whether he is performing the same liberating or originating function with respect to the vocabulary of the physical universe (as must be the case, if he is a philosopher, and if Reinhardt is correct about the "origin" of philosophy). The philosophical dimension of physical terms used to discuss the cosmos need not conflict with what we may call their "scientific" dimension; indeed, we may say that, at any epoch, no term can be *scientific* if it does not also have a philosophical dimension not simply identical with its function in describing the extended universe. And it is an error to assume that all speech about the physical universe is speech about physics in the modern sense, or meta-physics; we fall into this error by assuming that the use of mythical terms is in every case an adherence to myth, only partly mastered by the recognition of science. In other words, we interpret Thales in a circular fashion, a circle which has as its center our own acceptance of the identity between science and philosophy.¹⁵ This is inadequate, not because it is circular, but because it makes philosophy impossible by transforming it into an under-grounded metaphysics. Thales' cosmology may well be what tradition tells us it is, but it hardly follows from this that his cosmology is identical

with his philosophy, or that we have adequately understood the traditional account of his cosmology.

We must therefore see whether the notions attributed to Thales can be so interpreted as to make possible the recognition of the reality of the difference between knowledge and ignorance, and so, of the origin of philosophy. It goes without saying that our words will be different from those of Thales: but their difference must be contingent, or due to the difference in the time, and not to the difference in the nature of philosophy itself. Our interpretation is perfectly justified in translating the speech of Thales into another idiom, in order to make more explicit his thought; it is not justified in distorting the thought itself. We may begin by observing that there is a connection between the discovery of physics and the attribution of deathlessness to the psyche, and that this connection indicates the recognition for which we are searching. When Thales says that there is no difference between life and death, he means that the superstructure of the difference between knowledge and ignorance is independent of, or unchanged by, the phenomenal or historical appearance of the psyche. The becoming of the psyche, its physical manifestation as an incarnate soul, is the temporal reflection of the being of the psyche, its form or intelligibility, and so its actuality. The identity of life and death is the difference between Being and Becoming, and this difference is the superstructure within which Being and non-Being (represented by knowledge and ignorance) find their place and are revealed as intelligible.¹⁶ Being and non-Being, when mixed, produce Becoming (opinion): the three are separate from each other, or different, and the articulation of their differences is the superstructure of the Whole.¹⁷ The superstructure of the Whole is reflected in the psyche of man, the structure of which mirrors the articulations of the superstructure. Not only does the psyche imitate or "become" the superstructure (and, through this becoming, achieve immortality in the form of wisdom), but the superstructure itself, as the paradigm of the human psyche, is a kind of psyche.

Thus the identity of life and death means not merely that Becoming differs from Being, but also that life is death and death is life: Being, in opposition to Becoming, is dead; but this death constitutes

true life, for it is the total actualization of all possible forms.¹⁸ This total actualization is expressible in an *archē* or principle: water is the *archē* of all things. Thales comments upon this principle by adding that the world is *empsychon* and full of daimons. There is a connection between water as the *archē* or *physis* of all things, and the psyche. World or cosmos is an order; it cannot be characterized by the fluidity of water. The sense in which water is the structure of the world-order stems from the structural analogy between water and psyche or *nous*.¹⁹ Order in the world stems from the immanent presence of psyche and daimons: daimons are everywhere because the ordering principle in the cosmos is *psychic*: e.g. it is the metaphysical superstructure (describable only by analogy with the human psyche) which is the condition for the possibility of meta-physical speech about physics. Water becomes the structure of the world-order by submitting to the immanent *nous*-psyche which is the form of order. And water is, not matter in the ordinary physical sense, but the content of intelligible form, the principle of the differentiability of intelligibility.²⁰

If we wish to understand Thales by means of an Aristotelian interpretation, then, we cannot simply think of water as prime matter and psyche as form. Water is more like psyche than like matter; it is not a prime but a *formal* matter, or another way of expressing form-psyche itself (though both are analogies or metaphors with reference to the actual superstructure of the Whole): there is a fluidity in psyche itself, *an ability to assume all forms*. As Thales says, *nous* runs through all things; it is quickest of all. This means that everything is (in principle) intelligible, because of the fluent character of psyche. Water is the middle-term between *nous*-psyche and *anthrōpo*-psyche, and, regarded in this sense, it is the expression of the *difference* between them: that is, a metaphorical expression of the superstructure of the Whole, within which cosmic order is structurally analogous to the articulations within the order of man's psyche. Water is both psyche and non-psyche; it is the *same* and the *other*, the representation of the differentiability (and so of the intelligibility) of the structure of the Whole. The compatibility between *nous* and man's psyche, the ability of the latter to assume all forms generated

by *nous*, makes philosophy possible. Thus, the cosmos is daimonic because it is in principle intelligible. The principle of this intelligibility is expressed in the deathlessness of psyche, and so in the identity of life and death. Just as the daimonic is deathless, so too is the order within the cosmos of *nous* a "fluent" or fluid order, in that it assumes all forms (and so there is movement within the eternal); so, too, is the psyche of the knower "deathless" in so far as it also assumes the forms of the cosmos by virtue of its quickness or fluency. The deathlessness of the psyche is philosophy, made possible by the accessibility of the cosmos to the psyche, because of the common aqueous content of the cosmic *nous* and the human psyche.

"Becoming" (Being differentiated by non-Being, or the difference of one intelligible structure from another) is the serial appearance of cosmic psyche assuming its infinity of forms, as perceived by the man whose own *nous* runs through these forms simultaneously with the cosmos.²¹ To understand the cosmos or order, i.e. to philosophize, one must go beneath this Becoming (into the difference), one must ignore the apparent difference between life and death; and so, one must ignore oneself as a historical, mortal self. Philosophical concentration upon the self (i.e. the psyche) results in a laying-bare of the structure of the self as the visible reflection of the structure of the cosmos (and of the difference between the two, which is the superstructure of Totality). The hardest of all things is to know oneself, because one's historical self is the most insistent obstacle to the perception by human *nous* of the cosmic order, in terms of which the self is alone intelligible. The *archē* of this order, fluid psyche, is indifferent to the historical peculiarities of our individual lives. It is *deathless*: in order to be perceived, it makes us die as individuals, because it requires us to run through *all* of its forms. It requires us to imitate its fluidity, and so to cease to be *ourselves*. Thus, philosophy *originates* in death; or, as Socrates put it, philosophy is the preparation for, i.e. the beginning or origin of, death. And so the relevance of history to philosophy is contained in the need to desedimentize the psyche of its temporal accretions, in order to begin to die philosophically. Thus, philosophical death, although dependent upon history, is essentially different from it, and from the history of

philosophy (and the reality of the difference between the two is the superstructure of the Whole).

Deathlessness (the equivalent for Thales of Socratic death) is the eternal swiftness of *nous*. And it is an *immediate* swiftness; it has no "beginning" but is immediately present: it is *we* as historical selves who are *absent*, i.e. not present before the eternal presence of *nous*. The cause of our absence is the difference between us and eternal *nous*, and we become present to philosophy as we enter into the difference. Philosophy is the selfless expression of the swiftness of *nous* within the aperture of the historical self, opening into the difference between the self and *nous*, running forever, in *some* historical self or other, throughout the cosmos.²² Philosophy is *ex nihilo* because it is *ab initio*: philosophy has no origin, but is rather itself the origin or *archē* of every finite activity.²³ In the same sense that there is no origin for philosophy, we may say that there is no *need* for philosophy. Philosophy is the origin of need, because, as the love of wisdom, it is the expression of the eros whereby the psyche imprisoned in each of us strives for completion by escaping from the "life" of history into the "death" of the eternal running of *nous*. Within the perspective of history, philosophy is the *archē* in the same sense as water: it flows most swiftly, it assumes all forms, it permeates everywhere. In the words of Pindar, "water is best."

Aristotle, after interpreting the doctrine of Thales in a physical-materialist sense, makes the following observation: "there are some who believe that the ancients who lived long before the present generation, and who first theologized, supposed something similar about *physics*; for they made Ocean and Tethys the fathers of genesis, and water what the gods swore by, which the poets called *Styx*: for the most honorable is the oldest, and what one swears by is the most honorable."²⁴ The eternity of water is traditionally associated with the divine: water is the *archē* because it is *empyschon* and full of gods. From the very beginning, the excellence or divinity of the origin or principle made manifest the relationship between philosophy and religion. How we understand this relationship depends upon the way in which we interpret the statements of the first philosopher. It depends upon our understanding of the psyche, and so, on how

we interpret *religio*: scrupulousness, exactness, respect for the sacred. In conclusion, let us recall the view of Socrates, who, in the *Theaetetus*, repudiates the explicitly theological interpretation of water because it leads to the dissolution of all things.²⁵ The theological interpretation, in other words, is the mytho-physical interpretation which we have already noticed. For Socrates, the problem of philosophy is to cultivate the divine madness, which comes *ex nihilo* like a spark that sets fire to the psyche. The problem is to mix the fire of philosophy with the fluidity, the fluency, the water, of the psyche. To "cultivate" (*colo, cultus*) is both to "adorn" and to "worship." The cultivation of divine madness is then the adornment and worship of the highest part of the psyche, the part which is *afire*, so that the fire is not extinguished by the very fluency and quickness of the psyche. The proper mixture of fire and water depends upon the proper adornment of worship. The "religion of the philosophers" resists that disgust for the sacred which is a consequence of anti-theological ire, but it replaces the *creatio ex nihilo* of the world in the theological sense with the *ex nihilo* appearance of philosophy as the eternal accessibility of the world.²⁶ Philosophy replaces the chaos of religion with the water of Thales. It is not God, but Thales, who hovers over the waters. Thales is the purification of history by philosophy, the transformation of the waters of chaos into the waters of *nous*.

Notes

- 1 For Hegel himself, the beginning of philosophy is as it was for Aristotle: that is, the same at all times, and for all philosophers, whoever they may be. See *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Ed. Lasson, Felix Meiner Verlag), pp. 12–13.
- 2 Even if it claims derivation from the local version of logic, or the current theories of mathematical language.
- 3 See F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy* (Harper and Row, 1957); and Karl Reinhardt, *Parmenides* (Klostermann, 1959).
- 4 It is possible to deny that there is any such thing as an orthodox or generally accepted interpretation of any great thinker. One need consider only the history of Aristotelian scholarship, for example, to say that no such agreement exists in his case, and in the same sense, the soundness of Aristotle's remarks about Thales can hardly be self-evident.

- 5 For extensive documentation, see Leo Strauss, *Persecution and The Art of Writing* (1952). As examples of discussion by philosophers on this topic, compare Francis Bacon, *Advancement of Learning* (Spedding, Ellis, and Heath, Vol. 6, pp. 217, 290), with J. J. Rousseau, *Les Rêveries d'un Promeneur Solitaire*, Quatrième Promenade. Montesquieu's views on the political origin and function of religion among the ancients are too well known to require references.
- 6 *Op. cit.*, pp. 23–24. For the priority of logic and metaphysics to physics and religion, see pp. 74 ff., pp. 250 ff.
- 7 It will be apparent to the reader that, in the few remarks of this section, I am making use of the notion of desedimentation developed by Husserl in *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften* (Martinus Nijhof, 1900), e.g. pp. 372 ff.
- 8 Descartes, *Discours de la Méthode* (ed. Gilson, J. Vrin, 1947), p. 8.
- 9 The analogy between the *polis* and the psyche is based upon a structural isomorphism which is not itself a stage of historical development, but the condition for the possibility of historical development. Thus Socrates' concern for political phenomena is in a sense analogous to the Kantian concern for sensible phenomena: for Kant, the categories of pure reason, although not themselves sensible, are "visible" in and through their presence in (the structure of) sense-objects; one must move "upwards" from the empirical or phenomenal world to the conditions for the possibility of this world; and in this sense one cannot see these conditions directly or in themselves. For Socrates, the structure of the psyche cannot be seen directly or in itself, but only through or in political experience (that is, in the fundamentally political structure of experience). The latter constitutes a Whole or Totality of possible human experience: politics is the architectonic art, and the *archê* of politics is the psyche.
- 10 I.22–44. Once again let me emphasize that I am not concerned with the question of the historical accuracy of these attributions, but with their philosophical significance.
- 11 The pre-Socratics were by no means exclusively interested in cosmology, as is sometimes maintained; we know from such sources as Herodotus and Plato of their concern with politics (See Plato, *Protagoras*, 343a ff.). Diogenes Laertius says of Thales: *meta de ta politika tes phusikes egeneto theōrias*.
- 12 Contemporary thinkers, under the influence of science (in the modern sense of the term) even when they fancy themselves most sympathetic to the pre-scientific myth-makers, mean by myth not rational speech of a specific kind, but rather primitive or *pre-rational* speech: "Myths are original revelations of the pre-conscious psyche, involuntary statements about unconscious psychic happenings...Not merely do they represent, they are the mental life of the primitive tribe..." C. C. Jung, *Introduction to a Science of Mythology* (Routledge, 1951) pp. 101–2. For another influential contemporary account of myth from a scientific viewpoint, see Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, Vol. II: *Mythical Thought*. As to why contemporary men have become so obsessed with myth, a word which is

now applied to science, religion and art, consider M. Heidegger, *Die Zeit des Weltbildes* (Holzwege, Klostermann, 1952), p. 70. For a philosophical discussion of the meaning of myth in Plato, see Gerhard Kruger, *Einsicht und Leidenschaft* (Klostermann, 1948). Kruger's argument is perhaps too "religious," but, when corrected from a balancing, secular viewpoint, it becomes most suggestive, and may be applied by extension to the pre-Socratics.

- 13 That is, a physicist in the modern sense of the term. When considering Aristotle's interpretation of Thales as a physicist, it is essential to consider also Aristotle's concept of *physis*. See *Met.* 1014 b16 ff. *Physis* is not just growth or formed motion, but it is also the *arche* of growth. It is true that Aristotle's account of Thales is limited to a consideration of water as the material cause. But it does not follow that an *Aristotelian* consideration of Thales must be so restricted. (I do not imply, of course, that my interpretation is Aristotelian.)
- 14 In the formulation of this point, as in many other ways, I am indebted to Alexandre Kojève for conversations concerning the Hegelian notion of the difference between Being and non-Being. I do not, however, believe that this notion is *restricted* to Hegel, and have tried to state it in terms of the origin of philosophy simply.
- 15 On the hypothesis, frequently made in our time, even by philosophers of science, that science is itself a form of myth, or that key scientific terms are mythical, there must obviously be a difference, *within* rational discourse, between scientific myth and non-mythical science, or between scientific and non-scientific myth. Further, if science and philosophy are identical, then it is meaningless to speak of a philosophy of science.
- 16 Being and non-Being are compatible and co-actual; neither is derived from or subordinate to the other. We need not look merely to Hegel for such a notion. It is implied in the parricide committed by the Eleatic stranger in Plato's *Sophist* at 240e ff.: the stranger points out that, for falsehood to be possible, we must think that non-Being somehow is, and that Being somehow is not. If non-Being is actual, then it "is" in a sense, and, since it "is" not Being, Being is less than itself. and so in a sense is "not." Not only do Being and non-Being make each other intelligible; we must ask *how* it is that both are intelligible.
- 17 The trinity of Being, non-Being, and Becoming (analogous to the trinity of One, Unlimited, and Many in the *Philebus*) does not alter the fact that, between any pair of opposites, the superstructure is manifest as the reality of their difference. (Aristotle at least touches upon this notion when he observes that knowledge is knowledge of contraries. Being and non-Being are contraries in the sense that Becoming is neither the one nor the other.) This superstructure is none of the three, and presents a *different* problem from that of the relationship between Being and non-Being as manifested in Becoming. Or, put differently, the difference between Being and Becoming is non-Being, and the difference, *qua* superstructure, is indeed *nothing*, neither Being nor Becoming.

- 18 Greek philosophy begins with the concept of an intelligible cosmos, and therefore of an isomorphism between psyche and cosmos. It is interesting to compare with this initial version of Greek thought its final form in the words of Hegel: "... die Idee ist selbst die Dialektik, welche ewig das mit sich Identische von dem Differenten, das Subjektive von dem Objektiven, das Endliche von dem Unendlichen, die Seele von dem Leibe, ab- und unterscheidet, und nur insofern ewige Schöpfung, ewige Lebendigkeit und ewiger Geist ist." (*Encyclopädie*, par. 214) For Hegel, the isomorphism is developed into a concrete actuality: Greek philosophy is mediated by Christianity, and man becomes God.
- 19 On the other hand, the difference between water and psyche-*nous* is the actuality of the Whole, within which each element exists and is intelligible, and which may be itself expressed only through concrete or partial analogies.
- 20 Compare perhaps Aristotle's conception of *pneuma* as the divine matter, akin to the element of the stars, within the sperm, and the carrier of psyche: e.g. *Generation of Animals* 736b30.
- 21 For a development of Thales' position, one must turn to his student, Anaximander: "He said that the principle and element is the Indefinite, not distinguishing air or water or anything else. He held that the parts change, but that the whole is unchangeable." Diog. Laert. II. 1-2. The Whole is an eternal order of changing parts; the boundless—the Indefinite—is the infinity of forms through which *nous* runs. See also Ps.-Plut. *Strom.* 2: "He declared that destruction, and much earlier coming-to-be, happen from infinite ages, since they are all occurring in cycles."
- 22 See Heraclitus, fr. 50 (Diels): *ouk emou alla tou logou akousantas homologein sophon estin hen panta einai*.
- 23 Cp. Heraclitus, fr. 60, 103 (Diels).
- 24 *Met.* 983b6 ff.
- 25 180c7 ff. According to Socrates, the ancients concealed their actual meaning from the mob by speaking in theological terms. This actual meaning is the metaphysical conception of the universe as fluid or moving. If, however, my interpretation of Thales is correct, then the theological doctrine (or its public metaphysical counterpart) cannot be attributed to him; his own thought comes considerably closer to that of Socrates than is indicated by Socrates himself in his own "poetic" statements.
- 26 See Heraclitus, fr. 18 (Diels) for a beautiful expression of the classical conception of the "religious" aspect of philosophy: *ean mē elpētai anelpiston ou ekseurēsei, anekseurēton eon kai aporon*. For a modern statement of the same issue by a famous atheist, see Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, par. 58.

CHAPTER FOUR

Parmenides B3: Commentary on A. A. Long's "Parmenides on Thinking Being"

Let me begin with some remarks on Fragment B3 (Diels), which lies at the heart of Tony Long's stimulating talk this evening.¹ The Greek text, as printed by Diels, is *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*. This line is attributed to Parmenides by Plotinus, and is rendered by Diels as *denn Dasselbe ist Denken und Sein* (Diels). Long points out that this can be understood in two ways. Either "the same" (*to auto*) is predicated of "thinking" (*noein*) and "being" (*einai*) or the two infinitives are predicated of "the same" (7). If I followed him correctly, there is for him no conceptual difference between these two renditions, to which he refers collectively as "the 'mind/being identity' reading" (*ibid.*). I would like to suggest that it is better for Long's own version of this reading to prefer the second alternative and to translate into English as follows: "The same is both (*te...kai*) thinking and being." This suggestion, which is supported by Lambros Couloubaritsis² in an interpretation that is very similar to Long's, allows us to argue that identity is not synonymy, as Long himself points out. It also allows us to avoid the extreme anachronism of making Parmenides a Neo-Platonist or even German Idealist, as might seem to follow from taking the fragment to say that "thinking and being are the same."

Let me mention initially that Couloubaritsis has been inspired by Heidegger's interpretation in the essay "Moira," to which Long also refers.³ For Heidegger, *to auto* is the *Rätselwort*, the riddle word, which expresses the unfolding (*Entfaltung*) of the bifurcation (*Zweifalt*) of Being and beings, in the sense of an *Entbergung des Anwesens von Anwesendem* (246, 249). In simple English, "the same" is the enigmatic expression of the uncovering of the presence of entities or

beings, i.e. of beings as present, and so as "at hand" (in Heidegger's earlier terminology). This uncovering itself requires a *legein* and *noein*, i.e. a thinking in the sense of a letting lie before, a rendering accessible to human thinking of the presence of present things as lying spread out before us, but which we then collect together in discursive thought. The presence of what is present leads also, however, to the concealment of presence by the things that it presents; these things are captured in names, i.e., they constitute the beings of the way of deception or *doxa*. To recapitulate, the same is the intrinsically enigmatic unity of presence and what gets presented; so the very process by which presence shows us the presented beings leads to a covering over, i.e. the famous forgetting, of presence or Being. This is all that Heidegger has to tell us about the riddle-word *to auto*, which he says Parmenides also fails to think, i.e., to explain (255 f.).

Now to return to the two translations of fragment 3 that together constitute the mind/being identity reading. I would further articulate the difference between the two translations as follows. The crucial question is what Parmenides means by "one" in B8: *epei nun estin, homou pan/hen, suneches* (ll.5–6). "since it is now, all together, one, continuous." Contrary to the polemical presentation of Eleatic monism from Plato onward, this line says nothing of homogeneous unity. A "one" that is continuous because everywhere all together is a totality. On the reading "thinking and being are the same," the sense seems to be that they are one and homogeneous rather than two distinct elements within a unity. And this sense of "one" leads to all the paradoxes and contradictions traditionally associated with Eleaticism. On the other hand, if we read "the same is both thinking and being," then we can take "one" to mean "unity" in the sense that not only thinking but all other required properties of being, including being itself, belong to one and the same entity. In other words, "one" means that whatever constitutes a unity that possesses several attributes, e.g., thinking, life, and the spatial attributes of finitude, circularity, and so on. The unity of oneness thus refers to what we would call a *structure*. We can then accommodate the limited, spherical, and of course, living nature of being, which possesses an *ētor* or heart and so too a mind. One could object that

this interpretation destroys the monolithic homogeneity of Eleatic doctrine, but the reply to this objection is that it begs the question, and in so doing it renders Parmenides completely unintelligible. It makes him out to be either a fool or a charlatan.

I note very briefly that on my suggestion, the sequence of fragments 2 through 8 becomes easy to see. We cannot know or speak of what is not, which is inaccessible (2). Whatever we know or speak of, is. (3) can then be taken in a strong or a weak sense. In the weak sense, whatever we think, is. In the strong sense, thinking and being constitute a unity, called here "the same," that exhibits being and thinking (to mention no other properties). We can add the Heideggerian ornamentation here or suppress it as we see fit. I don't think anything of major import is lost by suppression, but this step is optional. I accept the strong sense, which I believe follows from the weak sense when we consider carefully its implications. (4) goes on to instruct us to "see with the intellect what is firmly present although absent. For it [presumably the intellect] will not cut off being [*to eon*] from its attachment to being [*tou eontos*], either by scattering everywhere altogether throughout the cosmos or by standing together." In other words, the intellect must be distinguishable from being in order, to put it awkwardly but accurately, that being can see itself, or as we could also say, think itself. Odd though it may seem initially, one can illustrate what Parmenides may have intended by referring to the intellectual intuition of Fichte. This intuition is enacted when we think ourselves and see by that very act that "I" am both subject and object. In slightly different terms, a unity of thinking and being is necessarily an identity within difference. Whereas we can say that being and thinking are the same, we cannot think discursively what that means without dividing being and thinking in the very act through which we identify them.

On the other hand, the intellect, or the activity of thinking, is not separate from being, since (in the strong interpretation) it is the same whole or unity that is and thinks. Note also that the intellect sees what is both present and absent. I take this to mean that everything that is, is accessible to thinking, whether or not it is being thought at any given moment. It could conceivably also mean that

being is both present and absent in a Heideggerian sense, but this is again an optional inference. It is sufficient to note that, in thinking the all as a whole, we do not think the parts as parts. Hence in (6), Parmenides says that it does not matter where we begin, i.e., in our thinking, because we shall always come back to the same point. This is true in two senses. First: in thinking the whole as whole, there is just one conceptual point; otherwise, we would be thinking the parts. But second, if we think the parts, it makes no difference which one we start with so long as we think each part through; for this thoroughness will bring us back to the whole, namely, the whole in the sense of the same.

Fragment (6) then summarizes the situation to this point. "One must speak and think that being is [*t'eon emmenai*], for being is and non-being is not." Fragment (7) reiterates the warning against the attempt to investigate non-being, and (8), as we have already seen, discusses at some length the totality or continuity of what is as a *pan*, for example, line 11: *houtōs ē pampān pelenai chreōn estin ē ouchi*: so it must either be altogether or not be at all. What must be altogether cannot be one in the sense of a single undifferentiated monad. One last remark in this series of observations. Parmenides frequently says "it is" or "it is not" and so on, in a way that is usually taken to refer to being, no doubt because of assertions like 6.1: "it is necessary to say and think that *eon emmenai*," or that being is. But the somewhat mysterious looking third person singulars *estin* could just as easily refer to *to pan* or *to auto*, and this would in fact make more sense, especially in fragment (8).

So much for my own suggested line of interpretation, which I take to be in agreement with Long's. There is another interpretation, or set of interpretations, of fragment 3, which apparently stems from Zeller and, following him, Burnet, who read *to gar auto noein estin te kai einai*. In other words, Burnet (who was especially influential among Anglophone scholars) takes the passage to say "that which it is possible to think, and that which is, are identical," thereby introducing the notion of possibility into Parmenides' thought. I take it that this is the *Ur*-version of what Long calls "the 'mind/being non-identity' reading" (8). Long says of this reading that

"it construes *esti* modally with the infinitives, 'the same thing is for thinking and being,' and it treats the active infinitive *noein* as a virtual passive, so that 'is for thinking' amounts to 'is capable of being thought'" (7–8). The infinitives, in other words, are taken in their dative value, and with two consequences. *Noein* is now construed as a passive infinitive, as Long observes, even though it is active in form. But second, the modal reading opens the door to the introduction of possibility, which is absent, not only from the fragment being parsed but from the entire Parmenidean conception of being. What is *capable of* being thought is dependent upon a *dunamis* of thinking.

That this opening of the door leads to unwanted guests is very clear from considering the interpretations by Burnet and G. E. L. Owen, who follows him, of fragment 6.1: *chrē to legein te noein t'ēon emmenai*. Burnet translates as follows: "it needs must be that what can be spoken and thought is." Owen's translation is "what can be spoken and thought of must exist." Denis O'Brien, once at Cambridge but subsequently affiliated with the CNRS in Paris, points out that Burnet makes a double error in his translation. "Burnet's translation suffers in effect from a double misunderstanding. Parmenides does not at all say, as in the pages of Burnet, that that of which one *may* speak, or that of which one *may* think, *must* exist. He affirms, to the contrary, that one *must* say and one *must* think that which exists."⁴ O'Brien goes on to criticize Owen's interpretation for the same misunderstanding. Oddly enough, he himself translates *esti gar einai* in the same context as "it is possible to be," which commits the fault he has just attributed to Owen. O'Brien does not discuss in detail, at least in the source from which I am quoting, his conjecture as to what led Burnet and Owen to enter the doorway of possibility. I take it that one reason is given by Long, in his criticism of the mind/being non-identity reading of fragment 3. The Zellerians, as we may call them for the sake of brevity, apparently wished to avoid taking Parmenides as an Idealist. To this I would add my own surmise that they wished to avoid attributing monolithic homogeneity to the Parmenidean doctrine of the one. Both of these dangers may be avoided by following the second of the alternative translations

given by Long for fragment 3, namely, "the same is both thinking and being."

Let me note that O'Brien, whether because of or despite the fact that he is a great specialist on Neo-Platonism, is also unwilling to follow the traditional reading of Plotinus and Clement. He translates as follows: "C'est en effet une seule et même chose que l'on pense et qui est." In his own English, "For there is the same thing for being thought and for being." According to O'Brien, the traditional interpretation, already to be found in Plotinus, yields "penser et être, c'est la même chose." He rejects this; "we prefer not to make Parmenides a Neo-Platonist *avant la lettre*." His own translation, in other words, rejects the copulative sense of *esti* in favor of the complementary or "completive" sense. Accordingly, the two infinitives *noein* and *einai* are complements of the pronoun *to...auto*, "or the syntactic unity pronoun + verb."⁵

O'Brien notes that this translation requires us to take *noein* as a passive infinitive or its equivalent: *que l'on pense* is equivalent to "for being thought." But he rigorously opposes taking *einai* in a passive sense. Hence the subject of *einai*, namely, "the same thing," is also the object of *noein*. I have two immediate objections to O'Brien's translation. The first is that it leaves open the taking of "the same" to refer to any one of a possible multiplicity of things, each of which is one and the same for being thought and for being. The second is that it is unnecessary to take *noein* as passive, and is in fact undesirable, as Long points out. I doubt very much that O'Brien wishes to attribute to Parmenides the trivial view that whatever we think, is the same thing that we think, if "same" is a pronoun that can stand for multiple items. He must want to say something like what Couloubaritsis conveys more fluently as "le même, en effet, est aussi bien penser qu'être." If we interpret this along the lines introduced by Long and glossed by me, we avoid both Idealism and the attribution by Parmenides of a conventional multiplicity of entities to being, an attribution which belongs, if anywhere, in the way of opinion.

I note also that O'Brien, by employing the translation "for being," tacitly introduces the very modal operator of possibility to which he explicitly and rightly objected with respect to the Zellerian or

Burnetian reading of 6.1, despite his own lapse in that same fragment. In short, "the same" is rigorously singular but not monolithically homogeneous. Unless Parmenides was a fool and an incompetent, and so not worth studying seriously, he must have intended something intelligible by the attribution of various properties to what is nevertheless one. If the properties are taken as distinct predicates of a homogeneous unity named "being," then the doctrine cannot be stated coherently, any more than can the being of the altogether not. One must both say and think that being is, because not to do so is to say and think, in one way or another, that non-being is; but this does not mean that being and discursive thought are one and the same.

As a result of reading Long's excellent paper and reviewing some of the scholarship, it occurs to me that Parmenides is something of a Hegelian. I do not need to emphasize that Hegel would not have approved of this assertion without elaborate qualification. But that is not decisive. To begin with, Hegel did believe that the end is somehow contained, even prefigured within, the beginning. In this connection, the spherical character of Parmenides' being is a striking prototype of the circularity of the Hegelian concept and even of Nietzsche's eternal return of the same. And Long's excellent emphasis on the fact that Parmenides is inquiring into the thinking of being, not into being as independent of thought, is also quite Hegelian. The linch-pin of this somewhat but not entirely playful Hegelian reading is the translation and interpretation of fragment 3 offered in various contexts by Heidegger, Couloubaritsis, Long, and myself. What is "the same" that serves as the subject of the two infinitives "to think" and "to be"? It must be the same as each yet other than either. If it is not the same as each, then obviously neither will be the same as the other. But if it is not other than each, then the two will not only be "the same" but will be *one and the same* or a homogeneous unit. The only remaining possibility is that the two are both same and other, or as Hegel would say, that "the same" stands here for "the identity" in the expression "the identity of identity and difference."

This "Hegelian" interpretation of Parmenides is not the same as what E. Hoffmann means when he speaks of the *Drei-Einigkeit* or triune nature of being, thinking, and *logos* in Parmenides, a triple

unity, incidentally, that includes *alētheia*, since genuine *logos* is for Parmenides always true discourse about being.⁶ Hoffman's remark is part of a long tradition of Parmenides interpretations, according to which the unity of being is denied almost in the same breath that it is affirmed. This interpretation was obviously known to Plato, who raises the standard objection to the standard account of the unity or oneness of being, namely, that it is impossible to attribute multiple properties to being that is understood as a monolithically homogeneous one. We cannot even attribute unity to it without multiplying being into dualism. I cannot find in the majority of the views canvassed either by Long or myself the basis for responding to this simple criticism. Not even Couloubaritsis has the answer, since his interpretation of "the same" is essentially static. We require here Long's (and on his testimony, Coxon's) insistence upon the living nature of being, together with Couloubaritsis' understanding that the subject of fragment 3 is "the same," but finally, the recognition that "the same" is an archaic prototype of Hegel's comprehensive identity in his famous formula, "the identity of identity and difference."

If "the same" is static, then by unifying being, thinking, and *logos*, it obliterates their differences or independent natures, and the result is the absurd Eleatic monism of the tradition. The different natures must be preserved, exactly as Parmenides attributes them to one another, and this is possible only through their transformation into each other in the dialectic of a unity that remains the same even as it differentiates itself. This is the dialectic of activity, not of logical relation but of the *logos*. It is the dialectic of a living process, not of an inanimate abstract structure, whether syntactic or ontological. All this said, let me immediately add that I am in no way claiming that Parmenides was a Hegelian. The most I would claim is that we cannot make any sense out of Parmenides except by taking one or two steps in a Hegelian direction. More precisely, I hold that Parmenides "makes sense" only as a kind of anticipation of a more adequate doctrine which he himself did not propound and would no doubt have repudiated if it had been put to him in the words I have myself employed.

I do not need to emphasize too strongly that it was not my intention to present a new and comprehensive interpretation

of Parmenides in a short commentary on someone else's paper. My main purpose was to signal my partial adherence to Long's central thesis and to make one or two suggestions for strengthening it.

As a final comment, I would like to say something about the general task of interpreting pre-Socratic thought. It is all very well to wish to avoid anachronism, but apart from the fact that one scholar's anachronism is another's historical precision, how is one to proceed in the case of the thinker who for all practical purposes invented philosophy in the Western tradition? This question was raised but not answered by one of the greatest classical scholars of our century, Karl Reinhardt, in his pioneering book, *Parmenides*.⁷ In arguing for the priority of Parmenides to Xenophanes, Reinhardt emphasizes the fundamental difference between the *Gedicht* of Parmenides and the *Dichtung* of Xenophanes. Parmenides invented a radically new way of thinking, one which he had not himself fully understood (111, 153 ff.). The poetry of Xenophanes, on the other hand, is written for an audience; it expresses a doctrine that has already been introduced (139).

The import of Reinhardt's distinction is that philosophy begins by separating itself from poetry, even if it does so by making use of a poem. Otherwise stated, one cannot explain Parmenides simply by translating his peculiar and obscure expressions back into the ostensibly traditional phraseology of Homer, Hesiod, and the other ancient poets. It is easy to make fun of Heidegger's etymologizing approach to pre-Socratic thought, and it is not altogether clear why philosophy should be an expression of the force of archaic Greek. But one must admit that at least Heidegger does not explain difficulties in ancient philosophy or poetry by simply comparing texts or citing rules from contemporary grammar books.

As Reinhardt emphasizes, Parmenides is using language in a new way, in comparison to all poets in the traditional sense of the term. We can no more arrive at a satisfactory translation of fragment 3 by quoting Homer than we could interpret Hegel's logic by quoting Hölderlin. In fact, Homer is even less helpful for understanding Parmenides than is Hölderlin for understanding Hegel, because the German poet is saturated by Western philosophy in general and German Idealism in particular, whereas there is nothing remotely like Parmenides in

Homer. On the other hand, it would be absurd to say that a careful knowledge of the Greek language and its local usage in Parmenides' own generation is irrelevant to a study of Eleatic thought. I am not saying anything like this. One cannot, however, fail to observe that the philological situation with respect to the meaning of the crucial lines in the fragments of Parmenides is what one might almost call Heraclitean. Everything is flowing, opposites are asserted with equal confidence and apparently equally ponderous philological weapons; we cannot step twice into the same interpretation. Or so it appears.

In any event, the task of a commentator is not to solve global problems but to make a few points that serve as a bridge between the main paper and the discussion. Having attempted to do so, I now lapse back into the archaic silence of *to eon*.

Notes

- 1 This paper was originally a commentary on A.A. Long's "Parmenides on Thinking Being" for the Boston Area Colloquium for Ancient Philosophy, and was published in their *Proceedings*, vol. 12, pp. 152-160, 1996 (Long's essay appears on pp. 125-151) [ed.].
- 2 Couloubaritsis, L. 1986. *Mythe et philosophie chez Parmenide* (Ousia, Brussels: 1986), pp. 238 ff.
- 3 The Essay appears in *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Gunther Neske, Pfullingen: 1954). Numbers in parentheses in the text refer to pages in this edition.
- 4 "Essai critique" in *Etudes sur Parmenide, Tome 1* (J. Vrin, Paris: 1987), p. 212.
- 5 *Op. cit.*, p. 19.
- 6 *Die Sprache und die archaische Logik* (Tübingen: 1925), pp. 11, 15; cited by Pierre Aubenque in "Syntaxe et sémantique de l'être..." in *Etudes sur Parmenides, op.cit.*, Vol. 2, p.120.
- 7 *Parmenides und die Geschichte der griechischen Philosophie* (Vittorio Klostermann, Frankfurt Am Main: 1959). Numbers in parentheses in the text refer to pages in this edition.
- 8 The difference between this rendering of B3 and that discussed in the opening paragraph of this essay is not evident from the transliterated Greek. The only difference is that in the first citation the word *esti* ("is") has no accent of its own (since *eimi* is mostly enclitic; it is oxytone here because of the following *te*). In the present citation *esti* is paroxytone, which is regularly translated "it is possible." Of course, the accent marks to indicate this interpretation were probably not introduced into Greek MSS until at least the work of Aristophanes of Alexandria in the second or third century BC, and were not used regularly until the ninth century AD [ed.].

CHAPTER FIVE

Alcibiades and Socrates

I

This essay is devoted to the question of how to read a Platonic dialogue. Instead of engaging in elaborate methodological discussion, however, I propose instead to present three examples of Platonic hermeneutics. The first example has to do with the philosophical politics of Socrates and will require me to offer an answer to the question why Socrates claims to love Alcibiades. I shall arrive at this answer by a consideration of the *Greater Alcibiades*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*.

I shall then turn to the *Protagoras*, and in particular to the first part of the dialogue that culminates in the myth told by the great sophist to illustrate his political *technē*. At the beginning of this dialogue, Socrates claims that Protagoras is even more beautiful than Alcibiades; as we shall see, the three men constitute an erotic triangle that further clarifies the relation between philosophy and politics. The erotic triangle of which I shall speak today is thus among other things an oblique commentary on Plato's trip to Syracuse.

II

In the *Republic*, Socrates divides the soul into three parts, intellect, spiritedness, and desire, which are said to correspond to the three classes of the beautiful city (*kallipolis*) that he is about to construct, namely, the philosophers, the warriors, and the workers. Eros is the dominant characteristic of desire, yet it is also found among the warriors, and indeed, in a sufficiently powerful form as to require strict regulation by musical education and laws governing sexual intercourse and reproduction.¹ Apart from their susceptibility to the sexual Eros, the most intense, pleasurable, and manic of the bodily desires,² the warrior is also *philonikos* and *philotimos*,³ a lover of victory and honor.

So too the philosopher, in addition to his corporeal desires, is marked by a "genuine Eros" for philosophy, thanks to a divine inspiration.⁴ There is thus a structural analogy between the *philosophos* and the *philotimos*; in each case, sexual Eros is modified by something higher than itself. This modification is far less successful in the case of the warriors than in that of the philosophers, as is evident from their respective behavior. The self-transcending nature of the love of honor is dependent upon the rule through persuasion by the love of wisdom. The question before us is whether this persuasion is possible.

I call your attention next to Socrates' account in the *Republic* of the fate of the natural philosopher⁵ in actual and so imperfect or sick cities. The philosophical Eros, unless it is saved by the gods from the bad effects of a popular education, will be corrupted by its very virtues into the pursuit of honor, wealth, and political power.⁶ We should also notice Socrates' discussion of the connection between Eros and democracy; the middle term here is the licentious love of freedom as defined by the indulgence in heterogeneous pleasures.⁷ Democracy is thus converted into tyranny through an insatiable desire for freedom, and tyranny is identified with the mad, shameful, and uncontrollable erotic desire.⁸

The corrupted philosophical nature will regard itself as capable of attending to the affairs of both Greeks and barbarians.⁹ It is worth noting that according to Socrates, Greeks and barbarians are enemies by nature, whereas the city he and his interlocutors are founding is Greek.¹⁰ The philosopher's desire for the whole or cosmos, still visible in the political ambitions of the corrupted philosophical nature, is quite different from the genuine philosopher's political concern. In a later passage,¹¹ Socrates says that the madman wishes to rule the gods as well as mankind.

I suggest that the desire to rule the whole is related to the fact, also noted by Socrates, that the genuine or uncorrupted philosopher cannot live the best possible life except as resident in a suitable political regime. No existing city is worthy of the philosophical nature.¹² The uncorrupted philosopher attempts in thought and speech to transform existing political conditions into a city that will

allow the fulfillment of the highest potentialities of human nature. The corrupted philosopher attempts to transform by political activity the existing regime into a city that will satisfy the Eros for honor, riches, and power. Should this attempt succeed, the result would be to generate an empire analogous to those of the great barbarian tyrants. I will turn very shortly to the question of whether Alcibiades was ever a potential philosopher; this to one side, he is plainly marked by the desire for comprehensive tyranny. One could think of him initially as a failed anticipation of Alexander the Great.

In the *Gorgias*,¹³ Socrates says that, just as Calicles loves two things, the Athenian *dēmos* and Demos the son of Pyrilampes, so he loves two things, Alcibiades and philosophy. Let us now try to establish more carefully the connection, if any, between these two loves. In the perfervid atmosphere of contemporary classical studies, it might be suggested that no explanation of Socrates' assertions of love is required beyond the obvious fact of Alcibiades' beauty and the mores of the day. But we are now concerned with Platonic intentions, not with postmodern psychoanalysis. That Socrates' love is not sexual is made plain by both members of the relationship.

In the *Symposium*,¹⁴ Alcibiades describes in embarrassing detail Socrates' indifference to his physical charms. In the *Greater Alcibiades*, Socrates tells the young man that he is his only genuine lover, because he alone loves Alcibiades' soul rather than his body (131c11 ff.).¹⁵ In the *Symposium* we learn that the motives of the young Alcibiades are complementary to that of Socrates. Alcibiades says that he attempted to seduce Socrates in order "to hear everything that he knew."¹⁶ As he formulates his intention to Socrates on the occasion of their night together, "nothing is more important to me than to become the best possible, and I believe that I could have no more masterly accomplice than you in this matter."¹⁷

In the *Greater Alcibiades*, Socrates is the lover and Alcibiades is the beloved. In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades is the lover and Socrates is the beloved. This reversal of roles is a consequence of Alcibiades' desire to rule rather than to be ruled. The youth understands very well that he cannot dominate the soul of Socrates, and so he employs his body. There is, however, an apparent discrepancy

between Alcibiades' account of his motives in the *Symposium* and the portrait of his character in the *Greater Alcibiades*. In the *Symposium*,¹⁸ the mature and intoxicated Alcibiades tells the symposiasts that he, like they, has been maddened by the philosophical Eros; they will therefore both understand and forgive what he is about to tell them. Alcibiades therefore implies that it was the philosophical Eros, or the equation of "best possible" with "philosopher," that led to the attempted seduction.

The appearance of discrepancy is removed on the reasonable assumption that the *Greater Alcibiades* shows us the initial contact between Socrates and the youth as seen from Socrates' standpoint. This standpoint is transformed, if not quite suppressed, in the *Symposium* by the self-serving memory of the mature Alcibiades who, whether or not he is as intoxicated as he pretends, mitigates the *philotimia* of his youthful motives by appealing to the Eros of philosophy. One could also suggest that Alcibiades' unrestrained desire to rule is itself the corrupted version of the philosophical Eros. What we are attempting to do is to understand the deeper relation between *philotimia* and *philosophia*. By this I mean that we are only initially interested in the psychological motivation of Alcibiades. The deeper question is the philosophical motivation of Socrates.

In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades tells how Socrates, unlike any of his other lovers, "scorned and laughed at my beauty and treated me hybristically."¹⁹ He adds that the symposiasts are to be the judges of Socrates' arrogance (*tēs Sōkratous huperēphānias*).²⁰ These passages underline an earlier charge of hubris leveled against Socrates by Agathon.²¹ In the *Greater Alcibiades*, Socrates tells the boy that he alone is in a position to fulfill his "hope" (*elpis*) and "thoughts" (*dianoēmātōn*) for comprehensive political domination, "so great is the power I have over your affairs and over you" (105c6, d2–5). Later in the conversation, when the topic of discussion is the relation between justice and utility, Alcibiades accuses Socrates of hubris, a charge to which Socrates agrees (114d4–9).

If we put together the two dialogues, Socrates is accused of hubris on two closely related counts: he attempts to rule over the deeds as

well as the thoughts or speeches of Alcibiades, and he is immune from the sexual attractions of those young men whose beauty he ironically praises. In short: immunity is the condition of irony, which is a mask of domination. Socrates hybristically claims to have power over Alcibiades, but also to be able to fulfill the youth's desire for universal tyranny. Socrates' "high thoughts" (*huperēphania*) are as it were higher than those of Alcibiades.

Alcibiades is arrogant but not mad; he does not aspire to rule the gods. Socrates, on the other hand, desires to live the life of a god. In the *Sophist*, Socrates suggests that philosophers are gods of refutation who appear among mortals in a multitude of concealing fantasies.²² In the *Philebus*, Socrates says that the wise agree, "thereby truly exalting themselves, that intellect is king for them of heaven and earth."²³ In the *Republic*, Socrates plays the divine role of prophet and lawgiver. In the *Greater Alcibiades*, he exhibits the desire to rule human beings through the instrumentality of Alcibiades.

To begin with, Socrates contends that although Alcibiades' lovers were many and arrogant (*megalophronōn*), not one of them could stand up to the arrogance (*tōi phronēmati*) of Alcibiades himself. All have been defeated, and so have deserted him, with the single exception of Socrates who, now that the field has been cleared of rivals, is making his initial advances, something to which his *daimonion* had previously objected, but now permits (103a1–6, b2–5; 102c2–4). This statement emphasizes that the crucial aspect of dealing with Alcibiades is arrogance or (literally) "thinking big." Socrates and Alcibiades are thus identified as the two most arrogant or hybristic men in Athens.

Alcibiades' arrogance consists in believing himself to be lacking in nothing but to be complete in body and soul. This completeness, of course, rests upon his ability to dominate his fellow Athenians, and through them, to aspire to the domination of the entire Mediterranean world. According to Socrates, Alcibiades regards himself as the most beautiful Athenian and the most imposing in stature. In addition, he supposes himself (no doubt rightly) to belong to the most triumphant family in Athens, with the most powerful relatives and friends, all ready to do his bidding, and to possess in his

guardian Pericles the most powerful personality not just among the Greeks but also among many barbarian races. Socrates adds to this imposing list that Alcibiades is also extremely wealthy, but that he is least arrogant on this point (104a1–c1).

In the *Republic*,²⁴ the lowest or epithymetic part of the soul, of which the sexual Eros is the most intense manifestation, is identified as the love of money. According to Socrates' analysis, Alcibiades is not characterized by *epithumia*, despite his licentiousness. It is helpful to note that Plutarch attributes this licentiousness to ambition.²⁵ Also quite striking is the absence in Socrates' analysis of any reference to intelligence, knowledge, or philosophical madness. Arrogance is evidently the surrogate in Alcibiades' nature for Eros; differently stated, Alcibiades exhibits the hypertrophied form of spiritedness (*thumos*), or the love of victory and honor. It is precisely this hypertrophy that both makes Alcibiades interesting to Socrates and impossible to control.

The point is that the extraordinary ambition, indeed, arrogance, that would be required to resolve the disjunction between theory and practice, or in other words to found the philosophical city, is precisely the attribute that would guarantee the corruption of that city and the deterioration of philosophy into ideology. Socrates cannot himself bring such a city, whether pure or corrupt, into existence. He requires soldiers, for example to expel everyone over the age of ten into the countryside.²⁶ Spiritedness is the guardian by nature of the logistic element, unless it is corrupted by an evil upbringing.²⁷ But all upbringing in actually existing cities is corrupt.

I am suggesting, in short, that Plato's portrait of the relation between Socrates and Alcibiades is a poetical representation of the historical experiment of the trip to Sicily, as well as a psychological analysis of why that experiment failed. The resolution of the political problem requires a synthesis of the philosopher and tyrant that is impossible. But Plato also implies that the refusal to go to Sicily itself leads to the triumph of the democratic over the philosophical Eros, and thus to another type of tyranny. This second point will emerge shortly.

Socrates goes on to note that the youth does not "love" (*agapōnta*) the properties in which he excels all others. If Alcibiades were satisfied simply by his own beauty, family, friends, and wealth, Socrates "would have been long since set free from my Eros" (104e6–8). In other words, comprehensive self-satisfaction is not the highest form of *hubris* or *megalophrosunē*. This is reserved for the desire for the whole, and so for an understanding of one's own radical incompleteness. There are two versions of this desire, the healthy and the sick, represented by Socrates and Alcibiades respectively. Both may be described as an *imitatio dei* or the attempt to imitate Zeus, who exhibits a divine care (*epimeleia*) for the whole.²⁸ Socrates imitates the intellect or soul of Zeus, whereas Alcibiades imitates his body. The philosophical dilemma lies in the fact that the imitation of the soul of Zeus depends upon complete freedom from Zeus' body; since this is impossible, the next best course of action is to bring the body under the control of the soul. But human beings are not in fact gods; those who resemble the soul of Zeus are not the same as those who resemble the god's body. Hence the need of the philosopher to persuade the body of the man of action, or to employ political rhetoric to master spiritedness.

The arrogance of Alcibiades thus poses the question of the relation between the philosophical and the political *hyperēphania* or *megalophrosunē*. These two forms of "high thinking" may be regarded as hypertrophied versions of what Aristotle calls *megalopsuchia*. The great-souled man in Aristotle's ethical teaching is worth much, knows this, and acts accordingly. But is not he who is worth the most thereby deserving of the most? And if he transcends all other human beings, is he not worthy of everything? Socrates and Alcibiades are agreed on this point, although they differ on the meaning of "everything." But this difference does not prevent Socrates from admiring the *pleoneksia* of the young Alcibiades and even from encouraging it.

Socrates says next: "If a god were to ask you, 'Alcibiades, would you prefer to live with what you now have, or to die at once unless it were permitted you to have more?' I think you would choose to die" (102a2–5). Socrates claims to know what he once again calls

the "hope" of Alcibiades' life (*elpidi zēs*), not his desire or Eros. This hope is to have the greatest power in Athens (105b4) and so to be more deserving of honor than Pericles or anyone else. He will then be the most powerful among the Greeks as well as among the barbarians who inhabit Europe.

If the god were to tell Alcibiades that he could rule in Europe but must not interfere with affairs in Asia, he would again, according to Socrates, be unwilling to live. Life has no value for Alcibiades if, as Socrates claims, "you are not to fill up, as it were, all mortals with your name and power; and I believe you think that, apart from Cyrus and Xerxes, no man of any account has ever existed" (105b4–c6). In sum: Alcibiades hopes to rule all human beings but not the gods. He is arrogant but not mad. Alcibiades claims to be descended from Zeus, from which he infers his right to rule human beings (121a1–2). He never aspires to be Zeus himself. Socrates, on the other hand, claims to be descended via Daedalus from Hephaestus, the god of *technē* (121a3–4). In the *Greater Alcibiades*, he places his *technē* at the disposal of the young Alcibiades' political ambition.

Socrates counters Alcibiades' hope to rule the world with his own hope to rule Alcibiades (105d7–e5). There is no evidence whatsoever in the *Greater Alcibiades* that Socrates hopes to convert Alcibiades to philosophy. Instead he advises him to exercise himself in order "to learn what one must know before entering into the affairs of the city" (132b1–2). There is nothing in the *Symposium* to sustain the thesis that Alcibiades was a potential philosopher. Instead, it is evident that he perceives the beauty of philosophy but is entirely able to resist its charms, thanks to his extraordinary political ambition. And even this perception apparently depends upon direct contact with Socrates. As Socrates quite plainly states, his initial intention is to make Alcibiades into a king and thus himself to function as *eminence grise*. Whereas philosophers cannot be kings, they can be counselors or unofficial rulers.

The problem faced by philosophers in dealing with men of Alcibiades' type is succinctly expressed by Socrates in the *Greater Alcibiades* as follows: "my greatest fear is that you may be destroyed by becoming a lover of the people (*dēmerastēs*)" (132a2–3). Socrates does not

fear that the young Alcibiades is a lover of the people, because at this time the youth loves no one but himself. But the link between spiritedness and Eros is such that the excessive love of honor cannot submit to the rule of the intellect. The success and the security of the tyrant rests upon the courting and seduction of the multitude.

Socrates' dilemma is now evident. Just as Alcibiades will be forced by the love of honor to descend to demerasty, so too the philosophical rejection of political power leads to the triumph of the democratic Eros. There is no stable mean, such as the Aristotelian regime of gentlemen, between the tyranny of the intellect and that of the desires. The mean is spiritedness or the love of honor, but if left to itself, it will be destroyed by the quarrel between the intellect and the desires. This is the significance of Plato's portrait of Alcibiades.

The political argument of the *Republic* is based upon two premises, namely, that there is a rational distinction between justice and injustice, and that justice is the highest human good. The philosophical argument of the *Republic* is based upon quite a different premise, namely, that the highest good is not justice or indeed any human virtue, but that it is the Idea of Ideas or the principle of the intelligible order of the whole.

The upshot of the political argument is that justice is impossible, since the city that is supposed to achieve it is itself founded upon injustice, of which the outstanding examples are the murder of everyone over the age of ten, the forcing of philosophers to rule against their will, and the imposition of what I will call Platonism on all public discourse. The upshot of the philosophical argument is that philosophy, understood as dialectic, is impossible, because there is no *logos* of the good, and no demonstration that proceeds entirely by way of Ideas.

If we consider only the broad outlines of the dual argument of the *Republic*, then the dialogue could very reasonably be designated as the first postmodern text. The argument deconstructs itself or erases the grounds for the restrictions upon pleasure and diversity of opinion that it ostensibly enforces. As Socrates himself notes, democracy is like a bazaar of human diversity, and as such, the most useful regime for those who philosophize about founding a city.²⁹

Since there is no demonstration in the *Republic* of the dependence of the political upon the philosophical argument, or in other words of the thesis that those who perceive the Ideas and thereby exhibit the philosophical virtue of wisdom will also possess the demotic virtue of political justice, the possibility arises that the *Republic* is a cryptic statement of the need of philosophy for democracy, and so that the dialogue is an ironical drama, either a comedy or a tragedy.

To those who admit this possibility, the case for Plato's postmodernism is strengthened. What seems at first reading to be an overwhelming condemnation of demerasty could now be understood as the essential first step in its justification. In Plato's own terms, what is the fundamental difference between the philosopher and the sophist? And what in particular is the difference between their political programs? These questions are direct consequences of our reflection on the relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades. In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates interprets the Protagorean principle "man the measure" as a license to extreme relativism. One might suppose that not only demerasty but democracy are consequences of such a license.

As we are about to see, this is not the way in which Plato presents Protagoras' self-interpretation. Nor is it by chance that Alcibiades plays a prominent role in that dialogue. In order to understand Plato's portrait of the self-interpretation of the great sophist, we have to ask the peculiarly uncomfortable but philosophically necessary question whether philosophy may not be politically more dangerous, even more destructive, than sophistry. Which is the greater obstacle to demerasty: a prudent attention to utility and self-interest or a preposterous, entirely unconvincing pseudo-demonstration of the dependence of justice upon wisdom?

III

I am now ready to turn to the *Protagoras*. In the prologue to the main discussion, an unnamed companion accuses Socrates of sexual perversion, not for loving boys but for pursuing Alcibiades, a young man whose beard is fully grown. Socrates defends himself by a citation from Homer³⁰ through which he compares himself to Odysseus and Alcibiades to Hermes. In the same prologue, Socrates says that

Protagoras is more beautiful than Alcibiades; "how could it not be that the wisest is most beautiful?" (309c11).

Despite this alleged preference for the beauty of Protagoras, Socrates also notes that Alcibiades gave him considerable support in his conversation with the great sophist at the home of Callias, from which he has apparently just come. Protagoras was initially unwilling to engage in discussion via brief questions and answers; this is unjust since Protagoras is skilled in the delivery of short and long speeches, whereas Socrates claims to be unable to follow long speeches. Callias attempts to restrain Socrates from leaving, but Socrates is adamant: "for I supposed that a dialogue in common with each other is distinct from *dēmēgorein*" (336b1–3), literally, "speech to the *dēmos*" or public oratory.

Callias supports what he calls the just request of Protagoras that each speak as he wishes, but Alcibiades denies this. He says that Socrates has granted his inferiority in long speeches; Protagoras must now grant that he is inferior to Socrates in short speeches or else continue in accord with Socrates' request. With his usual frankness, Alcibiades blunts the point of this defense by adding: "I guarantee that Socrates will not forget, despite the fact that he jokes and calls himself forgetful" (336d2–4). And in fact, not long after (342a6 ff.), Socrates launches into an extremely long speech, lasting almost seven pages in the Oxford edition and filled with poetic citations that are subjected to intricate hermeneutical analysis.

Alcibiades reveals Socrates' irony in the very act of defending him against the charge of injustice; that the irony is unjust is shown by Socrates himself through the skilled delivery of an unusually long speech. I note that Protagoras' demegory is the analogue to Alcibiades' demerasty.³¹ Socrates, on the other hand, delivers a tedious academic exercise in literary criticism. Furthermore, in the course of refuting Protagoras in the discussion concerning the unity of virtue and whether or not it can be taught, Socrates temporarily accepts the principle that pleasure is the good (356c4 ff., 358a5). He thereby associates himself with Protagoras' explicit scorn for the many in order to correct their opinion on the nature of pleasure (353a7 ff., c4 ff.).

Socrates thus demonstrates his ability to practice what I will call "learned sophistry," that is, sophistry addressed to the few. There is no evidence, however, that he is equally skilled at public sophistry or demegory. It is one thing to refute Protagoras in the presence of the leading sophists and their cultivated admirers, but something else again to persuade the Athenians to be virtuous. As Socrates puts the difference between himself and Protagoras, he claims that virtue is knowledge but that it is unteachable, whereas the great sophist claims that virtue is not knowledge but that it is teachable (361a5 ff.).

In the *Menexenus*, Socrates delivers from memory a funeral oration evidently composed by Aspasia, whom he identifies as his own as well as Pericles' teacher.³² Socrates says that he learned the speech despite his forgetfulness, thanks to the beatings he received from Aspasia. One surmises from this dialogue, now widely regarded as spurious, that Socrates could have engaged in demegory had he wished to do so. Socrates notes that it is easy for an Athenian to praise Athenians; skill would be required for an Athenian to praise Spartans or vice versa.³³ To this we may add that a much greater skill is required to criticize one's fellow citizens, and in particular to make them more virtuous while escaping punishment. The tone adopted by Socrates in the *Apology* suggests either that he lacked this skill or that he declined to exercise it as somehow incompatible with his mission.

One of the main themes of Protagoras' account of his *technē* is punishment. Extreme prudence is required by the wise man if he is to avoid the wrath of those whom he seeks to improve (316c5 ff.). At the same time, there is no trace of demerasty in Protagoras. In an unusually interesting passage, he claims that those who practiced sophistry in antiquity "put forward a screen and concealed themselves, fearing the offensiveness of the *technē* (316d3–e4)." As examples, he cites well-known poets (including Homer and Hesiod), prophets, gymnasts, and musicians, but no philosophers: in other words, only those who are capable of educating the many as well as the few.

Protagoras says that he does not himself practice concealment since it fails in its purpose, namely, to delude "those persons who

are able to act in the city." To this he adds: "For the many so to speak perceive nothing; but what the few proclaim to them, they chant" (*humnousi*: 316e5–317a6).³⁴ Protagoras regards the admission that he is a sophist and a teacher as safer than denial. To this he adds cryptically that he has taken other precautions to avoid the danger associated with his admission, which have enabled him to practice sophistry for many years (317b3–c1).

In his lengthy hermeneutical exercise, Socrates echoes this theme by observing that the Cretans and the Lacedaimonians were the first and best philosophers, but concealed their wisdom in order to prevent others from discovering the secret of their political power (342a6 ff.). On Socrates' ironical interpretation of the customs of the Spartans, they continue to practice what one could call an extreme esotericism. It follows that there are two kinds of esotericism. The first kind is practiced by sophists prior to Protagoras; this concealment of wisdom is useless, since it does not escape the attention of the powerful few. The second kind is practiced by philosopher-statesmen like the Spartans and Cretans in Socrates' ironical account. This kind of esotericism is presumably successful, since it is directed against the many, who merely sing the tune that has been composed for them by the wise rulers. One thinks here of the *Republic*.

Protagoras claims to be frank with the few and indifferent toward the many. To be more precise, he is frank with the fathers of his prospective clients, namely, the sons of wealthy and politically prominent families. This frankness, however, amounts only to the assertion that he is a wise man who teaches virtue. The teaching consists in the cultivation of good counsel (*euboulia*) concerning one's private affairs or household and with a view to exercising the most power in the city through deeds and speeches (318e5–319a2).

Socrates asks whether Protagoras teaches *tēn politikēn technēn*, the political science; the answer is affirmative (319a3–7). Socrates then expresses his doubt that public or private virtue can be taught; he notes that despite their wisdom, the Athenians regard every citizen, whatever his *technē*, as qualified to advise the city, whereas they listen only to specialists in technical affairs (319b4 ff.). Furthermore, he says, virtuous parents are unable to teach virtue to their sons or

wards; the outstanding example is Pericles, who could not rescue Cleinias from being corrupted by Alcibiades, his younger brother (319d7 ff.).

In his long reply to Socrates, Protagoras says that every citizen, and so every Athenian in particular, knows and teaches virtue to his fellow citizens (327b1–2, e1 ff.); he also claims that his own teaching is unique and worthy of high fees (328b1 ff.). If Protagoras teaches what every Athenian knows, then his *technē* cannot be dangerous or a cause for jealousy. On the other hand, if every Athenian citizen teaches virtue, then Socrates is right to complain that no technical knowledge is required to gain a hearing in the discussion of public affairs. Protagoras is thus in a difficult situation from the outset. He must establish that there is in fact a political *technē* or science, which can be most effectively taught by experts, but that what the experts teach is known to everyone.

To summarize thus far: Protagoras is faced with three distinct tasks. He must persuade the Athenians as a community or *dēmos* that he poses no danger to the public order; for this task, demegory or public oratory is required. Second, he must persuade wealthy and politically powerful parents to entrust him with their sons, and the sons to seek out his teaching. This task is twofold, since it requires Protagoras to assure the fathers that they need not be jealous of his authority over their children, but also to assure fathers and sons jointly that his teaching will make his pupils powerful in the city and effective in household management.

The second task is addressed by Protagoras' frank admission of his wisdom and intentions. He and the ruling class understand one another and their intentions are in effect the same: self-interest, to be carried out by high fees for the teacher and competent mastery over the city for the pupils. This frankness is concealed from the many by the art of political oratory. The third task, however, is quite different from the first two. Socrates challenges Protagoras to defend himself in the presence of his professional rivals as well as prospective students.

Among these last is Hippocrates, who has pressed Socrates to introduce him to Protagoras. Nor should we forget that Alcibiades is also in the audience. Socrates' playful assertion that Protagoras

is more beautiful than Alcibiades should not prevent us from observing that Protagoras and Socrates are rivals for the "love" of Alcibiades. The demegory of Protagoras is a useful weapon for the demerasty of Alcibiades. Stated more accurately, Alcibiades represents what Hippocrates would become if he were capable of mastering the frankness as well as the concealing art of demegory that Protagoras claims to possess and to teach. Whereas Pericles could not save Cleinias from Alcibiades, Socrates must save Hippocrates from Protagoras, and thereby from becoming a distorted image of Alcibiades.

Previously I said that Protagoras scorns the many or that he lacks demerasty. This observation must now be refined. Protagoras scorns the understanding of the many, but he fears them, just as he fears the power of the few. Both concealment and frankness are employed by Protagoras in the service of self-interest and self-preservation. This practical caution is an accurate mirror of Protagoras' teaching, which is not rooted in subjectivism, relativism, or a denial of the distinction between *phusis* and *nomos*, but in an interpretation of nature as hostile to human existence, a hostility that can be countered if not eliminated by a technical implementation of the understanding of politics.

In order to sustain the thesis that virtue can be taught, Protagoras must explain human nature to Socrates. The speech that we are about to examine is Plato's most interesting representation of the self-justification of sophistry. We cannot fully appreciate the subtlety of the speech without noting the dramatic context. I have already discussed the intricacy of Protagoras' rhetorical situation. Let me now remind you of Plato's indirect portrait of Socrates' situation. Socrates identifies himself as Odysseus and Alcibiades as Hermes. The relevant quotation from the *Odyssey* shows Odysseus encountering Hermes on his way to the house of Circe.³⁵ The house of Callias, who is host not only to Protagoras but to the most prominent sophists, is the house of Circe.

With the massive exception of Aristophanes, the main characters of the *Symposium* are mentioned in the *Protagoras* as visiting one or another of the sophists. In the *Symposium*, Diotima says that Eros

is the "hermeneutical" force that unites the divine and the mortal (202e3 ff.); in the *Protagoras*, Alcibiades replaces Eros, or in other words, spiritedness rather than Eros is at the center of attention. The issue is not so much the ostensible "love" of Socrates for Alcibiades or Protagoras, but rather the question of how the intellect is to persuade spiritedness.

In contrast to Protagorean caution, one aspect of which is frankness, the dialogue features the courage of Socrates, alias Odysseus. The point is sharpened when Socrates enters the house of Callias, alias Circe, and views the display of famous sophists. Once more by a quotation from Homer,³⁶ Socrates changes the metaphor by comparing the house of Callias to Hades (315b9 ff.).³⁷ Socrates is now Odysseus on his descent into Hades. By making use of explicit references to the passage from Homer, Socrates compares the sophist Hippias with Heracles³⁸ and Prodicus with Tantalus.³⁹

It would be amusing to attempt a further correlation between the guests at the home of Callias and the personages encountered by Odysseus on his descent into Hades. I restrict myself to Protagoras, who is tacitly assigned a dual identity. On the one hand, he is obviously Teiresias, the seer whom Odysseus must consult before Circe will permit him to return to his home in Ithaca. But on the other hand, Socrates explicitly compares Protagoras, who charms people with his voice and causes them to leave their homes, to Orpheus, who also charms by his singing, and who furthermore descended into Hades while still alive, in order to rescue his dead bride, Eurydice (315a8 ff.).

While leading Eurydice up from Hades, Orpheus violates his instructions and looks back at her; she promptly disappears. To this we may add that Orpheus is later torn to shreds by the Thracian Bacchantes. What is the significance of this elaborate symbolism? On the one hand, Socrates must encounter Protagoras, alias Teiresias, or master the sophisticated rhetoric if he is to be allowed to return home, in other words, to avoid execution by the Athenians. On the other hand, Protagoras is himself on a similar mission to Athens, a mission on which he too will fail. Protagoras is more beautiful, that is to say, more articulate, than Alcibiades; but in the case of politics,

beauty is not the same as truth. Both Socrates and Protagoras fail with Alcibiades, and therefore with the Athenians, whose spiritedness he exemplifies.⁴⁰

To continue with Protagoras, he justifies his assertion that virtue is teachable in a long speech that extends from 320c8 to 328d2. At the end of this speech, Protagoras says: "thus Socrates I have spoken to you in both myth and *logos*" (328c3). This contradicts his initial assertion that he will speak in myth because it is more elegant than *logos* (320c6). The nature of the speech is ambiguous, as is its internal structure. At 322d5 ff., Protagoras interrupts his myth to make a remark to Socrates about its relation to contemporary events in Athens. The remark ends at 323a4, but 323a5 ff. is a commentary on the myth rather than its continuation. At 324d6 Protagoras tells Socrates that he will now speak "not in myth but in *logos*." Strictly speaking, however, the myth proper ends at 322d4.

From 320c8 to 322d5, Protagoras tells a myth about the origin of the human race that is addressed to his entire audience, to whom he speaks as an old man to his juniors (320c2–3). At 322d5, he addresses Socrates directly. His themes in this section of his speech are (1) why the city takes advice from all citizens (322d5–323c5), (2) the punishment of the unjust (323c5–324d1), and (3) why teachers are necessary (324d2–328d2). A corollary of part (3) is his account of why virtuous parents have vicious children.

The myth proper deals with the origin of the human race, and not with the content of the political *technē*. Protagoras never gives us any details concerning the method of his *technē*. In the *logos* or the discursive section of his speech, he responds to difficulties raised by Socrates against the thesis that virtue can be taught, but he does not in fact teach it. This helps us to understand Socrates' remark at the end of the dialogue that Protagoras denies virtue to be knowledge (*epistēmē*) although he claims that it can be taught. The technical part, in the narrower sense of *technē*, of the political art, has nothing to do with politics proper or with the process of understanding human nature. One might surmise from Protagoras' procedure that knowledge of human nature, and hence of politics proper, is conveyed by myth and the interpretation of myth.

I infer that the technical component of sophistry is for Protagoras not knowledge of human nature but rather of oratory and rhetoric. The difference between Protagoras and Socrates is that the latter adds dialectic to the knowledge of oratory and rhetoric. In general: knowledge of the technical devices of effective speech is one thing, whereas knowledge of the ends to which these devices are to be applied is something else. A *technē* can be taught to someone else, but the knowledge of how to write illuminating myths cannot be taught; this is an affair of inspiration or divine madness. Plato lends his own inspiration to Protagoras in order to make him more eloquent than he could be through his native powers.

I turn now to Protagoras' myth of origins. "Once upon a time the gods existed, whereas the race of mortals did not" (320c8–d1). According to the ancient testimony, possibly confirmed by Socrates in the *Theaetetus*, 162d5 ff., Protagoras wrote a book beginning with the statement "as to the gods, I am unable to say whether they exist or not." There is a further tradition that Protagoras was expelled from Athens because of this publication. Whether or not this is true, it is politically necessary to assert that the gods exist.

At the destined time, the gods fashion the animals "inside the earth" by mixing together earth, fire, and whatever goes with these (320d1–3). This production is apparently restricted to the primitive corporeal condition; the task of assigning to each family its appropriate powers (*dunamis*), thereby adorning or bringing each to the proper order (*kosmeisai*), is left to Prometheus and Epimetheus (320d3–6). The gods create life, but not the distinction between the brute and the human. Prometheus and Epimetheus are not Olympian gods but according to Hesiod they are Titans.⁴¹ The most we can safely infer from this passage is that there is an ambiguity in the difference between our animal and our human natures. I suspect that the Titans represent natural human faculties required to modify the carelessness of the gods toward the human race.

This carelessness touches the difference between humans and brutes. The Olympians assign the perfection of the species to Prometheus and Epimetheus, thereby prefiguring Prometheus' lack of foresight, as evidenced by his allowing Epimetheus to carry out

the actual work, during which the latter in his turn forgets to save an attribute for the human race that will permit them to survive. In short, it is not forethought but afterthought that leads to the distinctively human existence. And of course the crucial issue is the preservation of the species.

Epimetheus seems to be quite competent at distributing corporeal powers to "the speechless ones" (*ta aloga*) in such a way as to preserve what we now call the balance of nature (320d8–321b6). But since he is not very wise, as Protagoras says, Epimetheus forgets to save a distinguishing *dunamis* by which the human race can preserve itself (321b6–c3). This passage allows the inference that it is easier to complete the natural ordering of the brutes because they are *aloga*; the possession of speech carries with it a certain incompleteness. Differently stated, the power of speech is dangerous; apparently it is incompatible with the kind of corporeal perfection that guarantees a place in the balance of nature. One thinks of Nietzsche's assertion that "man is the not yet fully constructed animal." For Protagoras, the possession of *logos* is not enough to provide the specific difference between humans and brutes.

Since humans are not *aloga*, they must be capable of *logos* from the outset or by nature. But in order for this capacity to be activated, survival is necessary, and the human body is not properly equipped. Prometheus now inspects the distribution of properties, and finds that human beings are "naked, shoeless, without bedding or weapons" (321c3–6). This passage echoes the description of Eros given by Diotima to Socrates at *Symposium* 203c7 ff. Needless to say, there are no Platonic Ideas in the myth of Protagoras. An Eros without Ideas is tantamount to perpetual striving, a striving that can only be intensified by the possession of speech.

Prometheus is faced with the aporia of how to insure the preservation of the human race when the animals are to be set free from their inner-earthly cave and placed in the sunlight. "He steals from Hephaestus and Athena the technical wisdom together with fire" (321c7–d2). Protagoras associates himself with the account of human existence as rooted in theft from the gods and consisting primarily in technical progress.

Prometheus stands between human beings and the Olympians. His theft obviously represents a certain detachment of the human race from nature. Despite Zeus' subsequent generosity, we have to assume that the Olympians would not voluntarily have given *technē* to mankind. In addition, the gift of *technē* is indicated within a myth that is not itself a product of *technē*. The most one could say is that Protagoras employs his *technē* of rhetoric to present a veiled account of his teaching.

There are in other words two different kinds of *technē*, of which the first is associated with speech, and therefore with the initial production of the human race by the gods; the second is the *technē* associated with fire, or the mastery of corporeal nature. Although Protagoras is himself a master of the first *technē*, he acknowledges its powerlessness in the absence of the second *technē*. If human beings cannot modify their environment, talk is in vain, because the brutes cannot understand them; they are *aloga* and so immune to *logos*.

But the possession of corporeal *technē* together with *logos* is still not enough to preserve the human race: "man possessed in this way wisdom with respect to life," i.e. the arts of Hephaestus, "but he did not possess the political wisdom; for this belonged to Zeus" (321d3–5). We can now state more precisely the relation between the two senses of *technē* or wisdom. The Olympians give mankind the capacity of speech together with the Eros or desire that is natural to corporeal existence; man is initially a peculiar creature somehow detached from the brutes, and incapable of defending himself against them. The mastery of fire together with the discovery of *technē* allows mankind to overcome the initial carelessness of the gods together with their personified agent, Epimetheus. But once again we see the carelessness or forgetfulness of Prometheus: Hephaestean *technē* protects mankind from the brutes and inanimate nature, but not from itself. For this the political *sophia* is required, and this belongs to Zeus.

At one level of his myth, Protagoras implies that he is a mortal Zeus who brings the political wisdom to Athens. He protects himself against the hybristic nature of this implication by teaching that Zeus gave the political wisdom to all of mankind. We must

now see how he removes the tension between these two claims. Prometheus cannot steal the political wisdom because he is not permitted to enter the house of Zeus, which is furthermore protected by terrifying guards. It is however easy for him to enter the house of Athena and Hephaestus and to steal the *technē* associated with fire, which provides *euporia tou biou*, "ease" in resolving the difficulties of physical existence, the aforementioned "wisdom of life" (321d5–322a1).

Protagoras thus makes it plain that it is more difficult to acquire political wisdom than it is to discover the bodily *technai*. And the two types of wisdom have different origins; the latter are stolen from the gods, or as I suggest, discovered by human beings, whereas the former is a divine gift. There is then no need to prosecute Protagoras for teaching the Athenians virtue, as Socrates will be prosecuted in the near future because he lacks the Protagorean demegory. Socrates is marked by the same lack of forethought that brings punishment to Prometheus (322a1–2). Protagoras is attempting to avoid this fate, or to combine Prometheus with Zeus.

To continue: human beings, now that they partake of the divine portion of *technē*, are related to the gods and become the only animal to worship them; "after this, man rapidly articulated speech and words through *technē*" and discovered clothing, beds, and farming (322a3–8). The sequence of development is ambiguous; Protagoras seems to derive religion from the discovery of *technē* and language from religion. I take his meaning to be that religion, like language and the artifacts of everyday life, is man-made, but it does not follow from this that there are no divine forces in the cosmos, just as language is a modification of the natural capacity for speech.

In this stage, human beings initially lived apart from the animals but possessed no cities; man was at first a tribal animal, possessor of "the demiurgic *technē*" but not yet able to protect himself against the powers of the brutes. The human race lacked the power of war, which is a part of the political *technē* (322a8–b5). In the state of nature, mankind is at war, not at peace. Protagoras sides with Hobbes over Rousseau. By nature, the human race requires the political *technē* for the sake of war or self-preservation, not for the sake of

peace or self-perfection. And the demiurgic or Hephaestean *technē* is insufficient for preservation or perfection.

The human tribe is able to protect itself against the brutes by banding together and founding cities. "But whenever they gathered together, they were unrighteous to one another because they did not possess the political *technē*, so that once again becoming scattered, they began to perish" (322b6–8). Moved by fear that the human race will become extinct, Zeus "sends Hermes to human beings, bringing them shame and righteousness" (*aïdō te kai dikēn*: 322c1–2). Apart from its function within the myth, this passage is amusing because it reminds us of the previous identification by Socrates of the shameless and unrighteous Alcibiades with Hermes. We should also note that at 348c1, Alcibiades makes Protagoras ashamed (*aïschuntheis*), with the result that he is forced to continue his discussion with Socrates on the philosopher's terms.⁴²

Shame and righteousness function to make the city well-ordered and to unite human beings with the bonds of friendship; this echoes Protagoras' statement at 318e5 of the two parts of his teaching, political and private. Hermes asks Zeus whether he should give righteousness and shame to a few, who will thus care for the many as a single physician can heal many patients. This would seem to be a reference to the Socratic teaching, that all existing cities are "fevered" and that justice must be administered by the philosopher-kings.⁴³

Zeus responds in the accents of Protagorean demegory; shame and righteousness must be given to all human beings, since if only a few possess them, as in the case of the other *technai*, there can be no cities. He adds: "and establish it as my law that whoever is unable to participate in shame and righteousness must die as a disease of the city" (322c3–d5). To this we may compare Socrates' statement in the *Gorgias* (478d6) that *dikē* is the medicine of psychic evil. At this suggestive point, the myth breaks off and Protagoras addresses Socrates directly, as though in anticipation of the latter's impending trial and punishment.

There is a discontinuity between the long introductory speech by Protagoras and the conclusions to which he is forced in his subsequent dialogue with Socrates. An oddity of the *Protagoras* is that

in his interrogation, Socrates focuses on the unity of the virtues and the subordination of pleasure to the *metrētikē technē*, the *technē* of measuring pleasures and pains, or in other words knowledge (356c4 ff.), which he finally admits cannot be taught (361a5 ff.). Socrates thus makes the same distinction between two kinds of *technē* or *epistēmē* as does Protagoras in assigning to Zeus the distinction between medicine and politics. Socrates differs from Protagoras in collapsing the distinction between private and public virtue, as for example in his restatement of what were for Protagoras two parts of his teaching at 319a3–5: “you seem to me to speak of the political *technē* and to undertake to make men good citizens.”⁴⁴ Just as for Socrates the art of measuring pleasures and pains cannot be taught, so too for Protagoras, shame and righteousness are a gift from Zeus.

Protagoras both attributes the knowledge of virtue to all citizens and at the same time scorns the many as thoughtless or ignorant of political affairs. He could avoid contradiction by following Zeus’ distinction between the *technai* of shame and righteousness and the others, but this would do him no good, since he does not teach shame and righteousness but rather the *technē* of speaking, and in particular, of demegory, in addition to the understanding of good counsel in household affairs.

Let us now look briefly at the three parts of the *logos* in which Protagoras comments on his own myth. This *logos* begins at 322d5 and is addressed explicitly to Socrates, whereas the myth seemed to be told to the entire audience. In the first part, Protagoras tells Socrates that he has now explained why the Athenians and other citizens believe that although only a few can give counsel on “the *aretē* of carpentry or another of the demiurgic crafts, when they go to consult about political *aretē*, which everyone must do by means of *dikaiosunē* and *sōphrosunē*, they properly accept advice from everyone, assuming that it is suitable for all to share in this *aretē*, for otherwise there can be no cities” (322d5–323a3).

We saw above that Socrates collapses the distinction between political and household or private virtue. In modern terminology, there is no difference for him between social and political virtue,

although neither is the same as philosophical virtue. Now we observe that Protagoras collapses the difference between *aretē* and *technē*. In addition, he replaces *dikē* or righteousness with the more narrowly political *dikaiosunē* or justice; most importantly, shame (*aidos*) is replaced by moderation (*sōphrosunē*). The general implication of these substitutions is that a secular political moderation suffices to insure self-interest; religion is part of demegory or political rhetoric. Hence the “secularization” of *aretē*, as one might refer to it. More sharply still, Protagoras implies that despite the attribution of political excellence to every citizen, it can be taught, unlike shame and righteousness, but like carpentry and the demiurgic crafts. All may share in it, but some may possess more than others. And this is a perfectly reasonable implication.

I have to be extremely concise in my discussion of the balance of this part. Shame has now disappeared; Protagoras refers again at 323a6–7 to “*dikaiosunē* and the rest of political *aretē*.” In the same speech, Protagoras again suppresses the difference between *technē* and *aretē* (323a7–8). Finally, he asserts that it is laughable or mad to claim to be a flute player or master of some other *technē* of which one is ignorant, but that the situation is quite different in the case of justice and in the rest of the political *aretē*. Whoever is unjust and admits this “before the many” is condemned as mad for telling the truth, which is taken for *sōphrosunē* with respect to the other arts. Everyone must claim to be just, whether he is so or not, since political life depends upon this; the admission of injustice, Protagoras repeats, is mad (323a8–c2).

In this last passage, *sōphrosunē* returns as the opposite of madness; it is apparently compatible with confessing one’s injustice before the few, or in being unjust but admitting it to no one. Let me refer to this as Protagoras’ “ignoble” version of Socrates’ noble lie. In either case, the existence of the city depends upon lying. It is now manifest that Zeus, or perhaps Hermes, did not succeed in giving shame and righteousness to everyone, and that universal possession of these attributes is not necessary for the formation and preservation of cities.

A final observation: in the *Theaetetus*, Protagoras is made to assert that no one is just by nature.⁴⁵ At 323c3–8 he makes essentially the

same point: everyone possesses some of the political *aretē* but no one believes that it is "by nature or spontaneous, but that it is taught and acquired through care (*epimeleias*) by those who acquire it." This is presumably the basis upon which Protagoras will justify his own profession, but it seems to contradict his myth. In order to escape this contradiction, we have to distinguish between righteousness, to which all human beings are naturally inclined, and justice, which is indoctrinated by political *nomos*.

In the myth, Zeus and Hermes refer to *anthrōpoi* or "human animals" when discussing the distribution of shame and righteousness. From 323a2 following, in the second part of Protagoras' commentary on the myth, he uses *andres*, "gentlemen," and *anthrōpoi* interchangeably. Shame and righteousness are anthropomorphic virtues or gifts to all human beings from Zeus. Justice and moderation, on the other hand, are political virtues exemplified by the *anēr* or gentleman. These are learned through experience, and they can be taught by Protagoras.

As we have just seen, however, moderation at least overlaps with injustice. Since a city filled with unjust citizens would be impossible, it follows that there must be two forms of moderation, one corresponding to justice in the conventional sense and the other to injustice. The many must be somehow just in order to be deluded by the few, and it is impossible for all of the rulers to be entirely unjust to one another, nor would it be advantageous to Protagoras for this to be the case, since he would then have no basis for collecting his fees (328b5 ff.).

Since Protagoras is unable to teach what is a gift from Zeus, he must concentrate on the political or conventional virtue of the gentleman. He cannot, however, assert that he is a teacher of injustice, or of how to conceal one's injustice, since this would make him a criminal or violate his own warning against the madness of public honesty, as well as exposing himself to punishment from the few enlightened rulers. Protagoras is therefore forced to lapse into conventional doctrine at this point.

No one, he says, punishes those who are defective in natural qualities such as beauty, stature, or health (323c8 ff.). Punishment

is reserved for those who lack the good things acquired by care, exercise, and teaching, and so who exhibit "injustice, impiety, and everything that is opposite to the political *aretē*" (323d6–324a1). Note that impiety appears here instead of immoderation; this is an echo of the previously suppressed "shame." This apart, Protagoras advises Socrates to reflect upon punishment; this will teach him that human beings (*anthrōpoi*) believe virtue to be acquired (324a3–6). In other words, if Socrates fails to learn this lesson, he will himself be punished, not by Protagoras but by the Athenians.

According to Protagoras, we do not punish the unjust because of their deeds, or for the sake of vengeance against the past, but for the sake of future deeds, or for pedagogical reasons (324a6–b5). Protagoras thus claims that even the criminal can be educated to be virtuous. This seems to violate Zeus' law by which the shameless and the unrighteous are to be put to death. In fact, it shows the difference between unrighteousness and injustice, or between natural and conventional viciousness. Protagoras is now concerned exclusively with the latter; he cannot hope to compete with Zeus. But he can try to persuade the Athenians that his profession is compatible with human intelligence or *dianoia*, which conceives that virtue is teachable (324b5–d1).

In the third part of his commentary, Protagoras develops at length the theme that is of paramount importance to him: the necessity of teachers. He emphasizes to Socrates that on this matter "I do not speak myth to you but *logos*" (324d2–7). There must not be any ambiguity on this delicate point. Protagoras thus repeats the verb *ennoēson*, "take it into your *nous*," that he used at 324a3 when urging Socrates to learn from punishment.

Protagoras begins by saying that if there is some one thing required for the existence of a city, it is "justice, moderation, holiness [*to hosion*]; and in general I address it as a unity itself [*hen auto*]: the *aretē* of a gentleman" (324e2–325a2). This is a striking assertion, in view of his subsequent denial of the thesis of the unity of the virtues. I suggest that Protagoras distinguishes between gentlemanly or political virtue and the natural virtues like wisdom or courage, as is more or less evident from the second half of the dialogue.

Note that justice and moderation correspond to the demotic virtues of the *Republic*. Holiness seems to be the political substitute for wisdom; nothing is said here of courage.

I also want to emphasize that Protagoras is not a "liberal" in the contemporary political sense of the term. In addition to his previous scorn for the many, he makes it clear that the city depends upon the gentleman for its existence. Protagoras agrees with Socrates about the natural distinction between the few and the many; this distinction turns upon wisdom and courage but not upon shame and righteousness. Women, children, and craftsmen are made virtuous by participating in the virtue of the gentleman, who is Protagoras' political version of the Socratic Idea of the Good. This participation is effected by teaching and punishment, which Protagoras almost immediately shortens to "punishment" (325a5-7).

At no point in the discussion of teaching does Protagoras claim it to be necessary to teach injustice or its concealment; since only the madman reveals his injustice, we may assume that knowledge of concealment is as natural as shame and righteousness are supposed to be. This is indicated indirectly by the fact that, although Protagoras admits openly that he is a sophist, he conceals the heart of his teaching in a myth. Nor does the explanatory *logos* coincide with what we have discerned in that myth. Zeus gives shame and righteousness to everyone, and orders that their violation be punished with death. But the political virtue of the gentleman, even though it serves as the principle of unification for the city, is compatible with a distinction between the competent few and the undiscerning man.

According to Protagoras, there is a gentleman's virtue that unifies the city. This virtue is taught to the sons of gentlemen and those who cannot acquire it are punished (324e2-325c4). Protagoras may actually be mistaken about nature, but if he is correct, then the gift of Zeus is insufficient for political life. What unifies the city by nature, namely, the virtue of the gentleman, is only the public appearance of the deeper truth about politics, namely, the knowledge possessed by the few, of which the crucial point is the need to conceal injustice by the public chanting of justice. We are forced to believe that

virtue is teachable. Protagoras does not say so openly, but he gives us sufficient evidence from which to infer that what he will actually teach is the *technē* of employing demegory in order to secure one's own perfection as a member of the ruling class.

Protagoras goes on to describe at length political life as the continuous education and punishment of citizens from childhood to death (325c4-326e5). Nurse, mother, teacher, and the father himself are allies in a war (*diamachountai*) to impress virtue onto the child; the military metaphor is exemplified by the use of force, both in the educational process and as punishment for the sick or ineducable. In general, the virtue discussed here by Protagoras is conventional: justice, nobility, holiness (325d3-4). Protagoras does, however, allude to his deeper teaching when he notes that the rich are better able to educate their sons than are the poor (326c3-4).

Throughout the passage just cited, Protagoras discusses how Athenians, and in particular the wealthiest, educate their children. But he says nothing at all about how he educates his students. Instead, he turns at 326e6 to Socrates' question why good fathers frequently have bad children. He begins with the assertion that "if there is to be a city, no one can be a layman (*idiōteuein*) in virtue" (327a1-2). Since there are many citizens who lack virtue, noteworthy among them being the sons of very wealthy fathers, Protagoras indicates that his services are necessary in order to make Athens a city. In other words, whether Protagoras is referring here to the public or private sense of virtue, the paradigm of the gentleman is not in fact an adequate principle for the unity of the city. The actual paradigm is the judicious use of the gentlemanly virtue thanks to the teaching of Protagoras.

Protagoras distinguishes next between those who are by nature (327b7-8) capable of teaching or learning and those who are not. He makes this point with the curious example of flute-playing (327a2-c4). This reinforces the previously noted suppression of the difference between *technē* and *aretē*. Nature guarantees a difference in human talents; the relation between the talented and the untalented on the one hand and the rich and the poor on the other is left unmentioned. Not so the difference between Protagoras and all

others: "if there is anyone who is a little bit superior to us in leading the way to virtue, one must regard him with affection [*agapēton*]; I believe myself to be one of these, and am superior to all other human beings in knowing [MSS read *noēsai*] how someone can become noble and good" (328a8-b3).

Thus Protagoras asks the city to love him, but also to pay his fee, although he leaves it to the client to pay the amount that he is willing to declare proper while under oath (328b3-c2). I take this demand for love to be addressed symbolically to Alcibiades. In the last segment of his speech, Protagoras once more compares virtue to *technē*, this time to painting "and the other demiurgic crafts" in which the young can be improved (328c3-d2). The assumption is that only a master of the *technē* can correctly train students. Whether or not this is true, it is in fact irrelevant, since Protagoras claims that every Athenian citizen knows what virtue is, thanks to the *nomoi* in which they have been educated. But this is not to claim that Protagoras is himself virtuous, for after all, he has not been educated and punished throughout his life in Athens.

What Protagoras claims is that he is by nature able to teach citizens of any city how to become more virtuous, as that term is defined by their own laws and customs. Socrates is therefore right to say, in a passage we have already noticed, that Protagoras does not believe virtue to be knowledge (*epistēmē*), whereas he maintains that it can be taught. The naturally gifted teacher is able to produce citizens who exist by *nomos*. The citizen is a work of art, like the song that is played on the flute by the virtuoso. Human beings are by nature political only in the sense that some persons have a natural aptitude for flute-playing. Contrary to Protagoras, Socrates claims to be naturally able to write the song itself. But in neither case does the song exist by nature.

A brief word of conclusion: in order to compete with Protagoras for the love of Alcibiades, Socrates is forced to employ the realism of sophistry with the surface idealism of philosophy. This is more or less the same procedure as is followed by Protagoras, although his idealism is obviously of a much cruder sort. Alcibiades is equally obviously immune to all forms of idealism. If we take him as a

paradigm of the imbalance within the human soul between the love of honor and the love of truth, the question is which of the two, Socrates or Protagoras, has a better chance of mitigating the destructive consequences of psychic instability, and so of the triumph of the democratic Eros. There is no evidence in the dialogues that Socrates is politically more efficacious than Protagoras. But the dialogues themselves may be evidence that Plato attempts to control Alcibiades by a judicious combination of Socrates and Protagoras.

Notes

- 1 III, 403a4-6, 416d8; V, 461b9 ff., 463c3-8; cf. 468b11 ff.; VIII, 546d1 ff.
- 2 III, 403a4-6.
- 3 IX, 581a9 ff.; cf. IV, 440e10 ff.
- 4 VI, 499c1.
- 5 VI, 494a11.
- 6 VI, 490b2, 491b4 ff., 492e3 ff., 494c1 ff.
- 7 VIII, 557b4-558c5, 562b12.
- 8 VIII, 562b9 ff., 573b6, 574d8 ff.
- 9 VI, 494c4 ff.
- 10 V, 470c5-6 and e3-6.
- 11 IX, 573c3-5.
- 12 VI, 497a3-4, b1-2.
- 13 481d1 ff.
- 14 219c3 ff.
- 15 In this section, citations in the text refer to the *Greater Alcibiades*.
- 16 217a4-5.
- 17 218d1 ff.
- 18 218b3.
- 19 219c4-5. Cf. 215b7.
- 20 219c5-6.
- 21 175e7.
- 22 *Sophist* 216a5 ff., c2 ff.
- 23 *Philebus* 28c6-8.
- 24 IV, 442a5-6.
- 25 *Alcibiades* VI, 2-3.
- 26 *Republic* VII, 540e5.
- 27 *Republic* IV, 441a2-3.
- 28 *Phaedrus* 246e4-6.
- 29 *Republic* VIII, 557c1 ff. and d4 ff.
- 30 *Odyssey* X. 279.
- 31 See *Greater Alcibiades* 132a2-3.

- 32 235e3 ff.
- 33 235d3 ff.
- 34 Cf. the previously cited 353a7–8.
- 35 X. 275–79.
- 36 *Odyssey* XI. 572.
- 37 In this section, citations in the text refer to the *Protagoras*.
- 38 *Protagoras* 315b9 ff., *Odyssey* XI. 601.
- 39 *Protagoras* 315c8, *Odyssey* XI. 582.
- 40 See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I. 70; VI. 16.
- 41 *Theogony* 510 ff.
- 42 Cf. the use of *aischron* by Hippias at 337d3 and by Socrates at 338b4.
- 43 *Republic* II, 372e7 ff. The initial austere city, rejected by Glaucon, is the genuine or healthy city.
- 44 Cf. 319b4 ff., where Socrates replaces *politikē technē* with *aretē*.
- 45 *Theaetetus* 167c, 172a–b, 177c: the just, the highest, and the noblest are all by *nomos*.

CHAPTER SIX

Philosophy and Poetry in Plato

There are various ways in which to pose the problem of the relation between philosophy and poetry in Plato. The most obvious of these would be to start from the ostensible quarrel between the two, as reported by Socrates in Book Ten of the *Republic*. Socrates gives the main reason for this quarrel as follows. The poets claim to know the truth but fail to grasp it (X, 600e4–6). However, poetry is more pleasant than philosophy, at least to humankind at large, and, Socrates warns us, “if you admit to citizenship the pleasure-seasoned Muse in lyric or epic, pleasure and pain will rule for you in the city instead of *nomos* and that which is commonly held to be the best *logos*” (X, 607a5–8).

This statement, together with the main line of argumentation in the dialogue, seems to support unambiguously the opposition between philosophy, or the purified eros that directs us to the heavenly Ideas, and the poetical pursuit of pleasure, which is itself closely associated with novelty and the impure or sexual eros, and therefore with the excessive love of freedom that characterizes democracies and causes them to deteriorate into tyrannical regimes (IX, 573b6 ff.; X, 607a5–8 and c4–5). There are some fairly evident difficulties with this version of the relation between philosophy and poetry. One of the most obvious is that despite Socrates’ criticism of the poetic teaching about the gods, and their erroneous orientation in terms of images rather than originals or pure forms, he continues to cite the poets, and in particular Homer, as authorities concerning the human soul. Apparently one can be mistaken about eternity while remaining a reliable guide to human affairs. Otherwise stated, poetic expertise can be separated from its excessive and politically dangerous pleasantness by subordinating it to the management of the philosophers.

A second and in my opinion much more important difficulty with the thesis of the quarrel between poetry and philosophy is

that Socrates regularly assumes the role of the poet or demiurge in constructing the city. It is not poetry as such, and not even mimetic poetry, but false mimetic poetry that is expelled from the city. The founding fathers, and by extension the philosopher-kings, are the true mimetic poets who copy the paradigm of justice or the city that is contained in heaven (IX, 592a1 ff. and b2). Socrates regularly refers to the constructive function of the founders of the just city by employing the verb *plaittein*. We "fashion" the city (II, 374a5), and "shape" the souls of the citizens with myths, including medicinal and noble lies (II, 377b6 and c3). The philosopher "produces" not only himself, but temperance, justice, and all of demotic virtue by looking to, and so imitating, the Ideas (VI, 500d4-8). We have "created" an image of the soul in speech (*eikona plasantes tēs psuchēs logoi*: IX, 588b10); and in short, we are the "demiurges" of the freedom of the city (III, 394b9-c1). It is true that Socrates says twice (II, 378e7 and III, 393d8) that he is not a poet, but the context makes explicit that he means only that he does not write in meter. The enterprise of constructing in speech the so-called beautiful city is inseparable from a philosophical music which is itself like the colors of a painting that sinks into the souls of the citizens; in other words, the philosopher-legislator paints the souls of the citizens on the canvas of the city (III, 401d5 ff. and 404e4 f.).

It would be easy to multiply the textual evidence that links together philosophical politics and poetry. However, this is not the path that I intend to follow in this essay. Or rather, I want to strike out on a branch of this path, and one that takes us deeper into the heart of Plato's understanding of the relation between philosophy and poetry. Stated with introductory brevity, I want to modify the prevalent notion that Plato excludes constructive or poetical activity from his analysis of philosophical thinking. My point is thus not the relatively superficial one that philosophers employ poetry for political purposes. It is rather that politics is itself an expression of the constructive or poetical element in human nature. Still more sharply expressed, I want to contribute to the refinement of the usual analysis of philosophical thinking in Plato. And I will proceed by way of a survey of the conception of human nature that is to be found in the Platonic dialogues.

The word *nature* is ambiguous and has undergone various shifts in meaning during its long history. Perhaps the most important of these shifts is that which distinguishes the predominantly classical sense of *phusis* or *natura* as divine from the typical modern conception of nature as *res extensa* or, in other words, as extension or body in contrast with mind, soul, or spirit. In all epochs going back to classical antiquity, nature has been defined by way of contrast with or opposition to an antonym. The most important of which I am aware are *nomos* or custom, *technē* or art, soul, intellect, spirit, and history. Each of these antonyms is itself ambiguous and admits of various senses. On the whole, however, it does seem possible to detect a common theme in the diverse understandings of the term "nature." To borrow an expression from Aristotle, nature is that which happens always or for the most part. This is so whether we think of nature as divine or lifeless. Custom, art, and history are all changing.

The distinction between regularity and change can also be applied to the soul, intellect, or spirit in such a way as to reveal yet another dimension in the ambiguity of our conception of nature. Soul, intellect, and spirit could each be regarded as the nature of the human being even though we distinguish between natural and non-natural operations or productions of soul, intellect, or spirit. One of the greatest difficulties in the history of philosophy is precisely to determine which acts, if any, express the nature of the human being. In this essay I am going to restrict myself for the most part to a discussion of what it might mean to speak of human nature in the dialogues of Plato; needless to say, I cannot exhaust even this restricted topic in an essay. I will try to give a general characterization of the problem of human nature as it is presented by Plato, a characterization based upon a sampling of the most important evidence. Let me emphasize the word "problem." I am not about to attribute a general doctrine to Plato that is based upon the juxtaposition of fragments from different dialogues. Nor, of course, is this essay a substitute for the careful study of each dialogue as an independent unity. My goal is rather to call attention to a pervasive theme in Plato's dialogues that is seldom given sufficient notice. I refer to the theme of *poiēsis* or constructivism.

Speaking very generally, there are three broad positions that we might take on the question whether human beings have a common nature. The first two are obvious enough; we may either affirm or deny the proposition in question. The third position is much subtler and accordingly more difficult to articulate; it is expressed by Nietzsche's Zarathustra in the assertion that man is the not yet established or ascertained animal: *festgestellte* can also be translated literally as "securely positioned." In other words: man is an animal, not a god or a machine, and an animal that has a position or is partly put together in a way that can be ascertained but not precisely defined. Human beings can become not merely who they are, as Zarathustra says in partial citation of Pindar (he omits Pindar's qualifying *mathōn*, "by understanding"); they can also become other than they are. But "other" is circumscribed; man can become a superman (*Übermensch*); but a "super" man is still some sort of man.

What in fact do the two extreme answers to our question mean? I suppose that they must mean something like this: either human being has a fixed nature or it has no nature and so no fixity whatsoever. Now it seems obvious that both of these views, if taken literally, are absurd. I cannot think of anything about which we could state with certitude that it has a fixed nature, if this last expression means "fixed in all respects." But even allowing for the distinction between nature and chance, there is an indeterminate range in human activity that rules out any reference to our kind as fixed in nature. To take a simple example, those who believe in human nature normally speak about natural ends or laws that guide or govern our acts. But it is obvious that we can deviate from these ends and disobey these laws. Perhaps we ought not to do so, but we can. Conversely, it is absurd to say that human beings exhibit no fixity whatsoever, since this would mean that we have no defining properties, and so that it makes no sense to speak about "human being" at all. I will not attempt to provide a detailed refutation of what is manifestly absurd. Instead, at least for the purposes of this talk, I am going to assume that all sensible or defensible theses about human being, when they are formulated with moderate care, are versions of the third view. I restate this third view as follows: human

being has a nature, but it is partly open. By "partly open" I mean that human being is not entirely fixed; it is part of our nature to be varying or adding to as well as subtracting from what we choose to be. In speaking about Plato, I need to make explicit a corollary to the thesis of partial openness, a corollary that may or may not be accepted by all sensible students of human nature. The corollary states that human nature is partly divided against itself. Human being is stamped by what Hegel calls an "*innere Zerrissenheit*," a tear or rip in our internal fabric which cannot be entirely stitched together by our own efforts.

Now there cannot be any doubt that Plato also adhered to a view of *innere Zerrissenheit* in human nature. This can be illustrated very easily by citing the doctrine of the soul in the *Republic*. Socrates speaks there of the three parts of the soul, intelligence, spiritedness, and desire. He makes it explicit that desire and intellect are in conflict, and further that the intellect is incapable of controlling desire directly, but can do so only through the mediation of spiritedness. Socrates refers to the soul as part master and part slave "by nature" (IV, 444b4-5). Human nature is thus divided against itself, and there is no natural guarantee that intelligence will triumph. This triumph requires the rule of philosophy, which draws much of its effectiveness from art.

Before I go any farther, let me reply to a possible objection. Is there not a difference between granting that human beings do not always live in accord with their nature and the thesis that human nature is intrinsically open? One might hold, in other words, that whereas human beings may disregard what is right by nature, this does not change the fact that it is both possible and better for them to live in accord with nature. To this I reply as follows. It may or may not be true that there is a way of human life that is best by nature. But it is certainly true that we must be persuaded if we are to live in accord with whatever philosophers claim to be natural for us. There is a critical zone in which nature does not enforce her ends or laws. Since we are free to disobey these laws (but not, of course, all natural laws), we are open to a life in opposition to nature. Furthermore, there is an important sense in which we are compelled to live

in opposition to nature, a sense that is guaranteed by nature herself. This view is to be found in Plato as well as in modern thinkers like Hobbes and Hegel.

In short, I exclude as absurd the thesis that human nature is non-existent or that we are simply and completely "open," as though we constituted an ontological void or nullity. Equally absurd, however, is the thesis that we are capable of living "in accord with nature" by the straightforward expression of our natural constitution. To say that we are partly open is also to say that we are partly closed. As to the question whether what is now partly closed might be subsequently opened, or conversely whether what is now open might be subsequently closed, I reply that there are no certain limits to the fixity of human nature. But in saying this, I do not mean that we are in total ignorance concerning what it is to be human. I mean that this question is finally not scientific or metaphysical but rather belongs to the domain of common sense and sound judgment. We have to evaluate the results of science and the claims of metaphysics on the basis of what we actually are, always or for the most part. This includes deciding whether we ought to be other than we are. But as soon as we become something that is always or for the most part other than what we human beings presently are and have been, then we shall cease to be human beings, and with us, philosophy will also cease.

In my remarks to this point I have tried to sketch the general terrain within which to locate the Platonic view of human nature. I now turn more precisely to Plato. And first I need a technical distinction. Plato speaks of nature in two broad senses. In the first sense, that which exists by nature is not man-made. The most dramatic instance is the cosmos, which the dialogues attribute, whether metaphorically or literally, to a divine artificer. In the second sense, the dialogues speak of "nature" as the power or essence of something, whether that thing is itself natural or artificial. I want to illustrate this second sense with a crucial example, namely, the *polis* or city-state. As is well-known, Aristotle includes among his three or four definitions of human being the assertion that man is by nature the political animal. What is not so well-known is the fact

that no such assertion occurs in the Platonic dialogues. Let us make a preliminary assessment of what this means.

Again I start with a broad distinction. The root of the Greek word *phusis* signifies originally both "growth" and "showing forth" or "emergence into the domain of visibility or sunlight." The cosmos is visible but one could not say that it grows; plants grow, and in fact the Greek word for plants is *ta phuta*. Parenthetically, I note that in a striking passage in Book Ten of the *Republic* (597d5), Socrates uses the word *phutourgos* or "gardener" to refer to the god who grows the Ideas or paradigms of the entities of genesis. But animals also grow, and thus so too do human beings, whereas one would not normally speak of the "growth" of human artifacts except in a metaphorical sense, or when referring to the results of breeding plants or animals, and so to a modification of living nature. *Phusis* is clearly associated with the notion of life; since this life is not man-made, it is normally attributed to the activity of the gods; and indeed, *phusis* was popularly regarded by the ancients as a goddess. In sum, let us say that the natural is initially and primarily divine life; derivatively, it is everything that is present to human perception and cognition as given to us by the gods. Third, there are deeds and speeches which can be called "natural" even though they are neither simply given nor do they grow forth from the given without human action. Cities do not grow on trees or bushes, but they may be regarded as natural in the sense that human nature can be fulfilled only through political or communal life. Aristotle's famous assertion, previously cited, that the natural is what occurs always or for the most part, is a kind of secularized version of this broader Greek view. The human changes continually, as does life itself. But the ways in which human things change, like the ways of life and genesis altogether, do not change. This is not enough for an exhaustive account of Aristotle's doctrine of nature, but it will do for our present purposes. "Nature" is orderly change; the ways of change are fixed. This means, of course, that they are not arbitrary or spontaneous, or dependent upon the inscrutable will of the gods. What is fixed in the sense of being regular or orderly is knowable. We can *count* on this order, an expression that brings out very nicely the important role played by mathematics on

the one hand and what Aristotle would call the human or political implications of natural order on the other. Nature is not only orderly but it is also authoritative and reliable. As one could also express this, nature is both beautiful and good.

When Aristotle says that man is by nature the political animal, he certainly means to say that human beings must bring cities into existence, but more importantly that the political telos of human nature, while of course depending upon practical intelligence, is accessible to us through practice. I call to your attention a crucial implication of this view. Philosophy, and above all theory, is not necessary for the coming into existence of cities that are adequate, whatever their faults, to the expression of our natural political telos. In other words, closely connected with the thesis that man is by nature the political animal is the Aristotelian tripartition of theory, practice, and production. The perfection of theory, or the *bios theoretikos*, is not the same as the perfection of practice or the *bios praktikos*. It is not merely that cities come into existence without philosophers. What is also the case is that the perfection of the political component of human nature does not depend upon philosophy. It is therefore also true that for Aristotle, the satisfaction of the political telos does not depend upon the achievement of some extreme, unnatural form of perfection. This constellation of doctrines is quite foreign to, and was certainly intended as a criticism of, Plato.

Whereas Plato of course speaks of "the nature" of the city, just as he does of the nature of man, he does so to designate its power or essence: the way in which it must be, in order to fulfill the function of a city. The city is not, however, "natural" in the Aristotelian sense that it is the orderly consequence of man's political nature. On the contrary, Socrates speaks on more than one occasion of human beings as sick by nature, as having disordered souls that require philosophical therapy or psychiatry, as incapable of living just or good lives unless they are healed or governed by philosopher-kings. For this reason his usual account of the city is that of an artifact. This is evident in the terminology of the *Republic* and in the central paradigm of the *Statesman*, to mention only the two most authoritative sources for Plato's political views.

Aristotle would no doubt agree with Plato's view of the defects of human nature, but not at all with the diagnosis of a sickness that can be cured only by a combination of violence and philosophy. Aristotle's *Ethics* and *Politics* are intended as expressions of political excellence that is accessible by nature. Plato's *Republic*, even if we do not take it literally as a prescription for actual political revolution, nevertheless and even more on this supposition expresses the impossibility of attaining to political excellence by what Aristotle would call natural means.

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates speaks of justice as the medicine of the soul (478d6-7). Whereas health is the order of the body, justice and temperance are the order of the soul (504c5-d4). In an earlier passage, *Gorgias*, the great rhetorician, describes how his brother, a physician, engaged him to persuade a patient to take a bitter medicine (456b6 ff.). Socrates subsequently says that the art of rhetoric in the usual sense stands to medicine as does the art of the pastry chef to that of the gymnastics trainer (465c1 ff.). But Socrates claims to be virtually the only Athenian who practices the true art of politics, and in so doing, compares himself to a physician (521d6 ff., e3 ff.). The genuine art of politics is in other words the medicine of the soul; philosophy is required to heal injustice. Art is required in order to rectify the natural disorder of the human being. This series of passages should be connected to the discussion of genuine or philosophical rhetoric in the *Phaedrus*, where Socrates refers to rhetoric as the medicine of the soul (270b1-c2). The rhetoric of *Gorgias* is akin to that of the pastry cook, but this does not mean that rhetoric is superfluous to politics. What we require is the rhetoric of Socrates or Plato himself, or genuine rather than specious psychiatry.

The intrinsic sickness or psychic disorder of the human being is also central to the political discussion in the *Republic*. I have already made this general point with respect to the parts of the soul. It can be made with equal ease with respect to the city. What Socrates calls the "true" and "healthy" city (II, 372e6-8) is almost immediately rejected because of Glaucon's complaint that its citizens are restricted to a vegetarian diet and have no couches on which to recline while eating (372e6-8). Socrates does not mention it, but we may note that

in this true city, which is fit for pigs but not human beings, there is no philosophy. Socrates is forced to start again in the construction of what will be the just or "beautiful" city (VII, 527c2) in which philosophers rule. He calls this city "luxurious" (*truphōsan*: II, 372e3) and "fevered" (*phlegmainousan*: e6–8). The natural disorder or sickness of the human soul is thus represented by Glaucon, the extremely erotic youth (III, 403a4–5; V, 474d4) who is also very courageous (II, 357a3). Glaucon is the interlocutor in the most philosophical passages of the dialogue and it is he who encourages Socrates to speak about topics which he is reluctant to discuss, including the noble lie (III, 414c11) and the nature of the good (VI, 509c3).

Glaucon's erotic nature is a perfect image of the sickness intrinsic to the human being. On the one hand, eros is an essential component of the philosophical nature, as we know not only from the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* but also from the discussion of the philosopher in the *Republic*, a point I have discussed in more detail elsewhere.¹ On the other hand, the *Republic* makes explicit the political danger of eros by identifying it as a tyrant and madman that drives out the useful desires such as shame and temperance (IX, 573b6 ff.). Eros *turannos* (573d3) is obviously unjust, and hence constitutes the sickness of the soul. The intrinsic ambiguity of eros is not overcome by the claim that the philosophical eros differs in nature from that of the body; this is not correct. As is obvious throughout the dialogues, the human eros must be transformed or deflected from its corporeal objects to a desire for the Platonic Ideas; but it is the same eros in all cases. In the *Symposium*, it is not Socrates who distinguishes between a noble and a base eros but the refined pederast Pausanias. That the philosopher, as hyper-erotic and even manic, is an extremely dangerous type, quite unstable in its youth, is made plain in the *Republic* at VI, 491e1 ff., where Socrates explains how the best natures are the most harmed by a bad education, and that unless he is saved by good luck, even the well-educated philosopher will be destroyed by the wrong soil and nurture.

The philosopher is a physician of the soul (cf. VI, 489c1) who must moderate or shape the fundamentally erotic nature of the human being by an elaborate political rhetoric that features the telling

of medicinal lies (II, 382c6 ff.; III, 389b2 ff., 414b8 ff.; V, 459c2–d1) and the comprehensive regulation of education from the cradle to the grave in the case of the guardians. This of course raises the question of who will properly train the potential philosophers. Socrates' reply is explicit if not entirely unambiguous. The fate of the potential philosopher depends upon good luck, as for example in his own case, namely, the *daimonion* or demonic voice that saved him from his own divided nature. As for his successors, they will be trained by Socrates, or rather by Plato, who assumes the prototypical figure of the philosophical prophet and lawgiver.

I note that at III, 399e5–7, Socrates claims that the musical and gymnastic education they have designed amounts to a purging of the luxury of the city. He does not say that it has purged the fevers of the city. But we do not need to argue from silence. The elaborate steps taken to control sexual reproduction among the guardians, including rigged lotteries to select mates, direct lies, and the destruction of offspring of uneugenic intercourse (V, 459a1–460c5) will eventually fail, thus leading to the destruction of the city (VIII, 546a2 ff.). But even while the city exists, it will contain injustice. Socrates says (III, 410a2–4) that the physicians of this city will put to death those who are sick in the soul. More dramatically still, the largest class in the city, consisting of workers of all kinds, is not subjected to the education, restrictions on breeding, or supervision of occupations that stamp the souls of the guardians. It is obvious that the largest portion of the city is thus characterized by an intrinsic or natural injustice that cannot be removed by philosophy but only regulated by the police. Nor should one forget the philosophers themselves, who would prefer to philosophize but who are compelled to rule. It would take too long to analyze this complex and controversial issue; suffice it to say that there is legitimate reason for supposing that, in compelling them to choose an inferior over a superior life, the city is doing an injustice to its best citizens. Finally, I remind you that the first act of the philosopher kings will be to send everyone over the age of ten into the countryside (VII, 540e5), an obvious euphemism for something very close to what is today called "ethnic cleansing."

It is true that, according to Socrates, the beautiful city has been built "in accord with nature" (IV, 428e9). But it is equally true that the human being is divided against itself by nature, as is most obvious from the ambiguity of eros, the principle of philosophy and tyranny. Plato's point is no different from that of Machiavelli in the *Prince*: justice depends upon initial injustice; nor will the latter ever be eradicated from human affairs. It can only be controlled by medicinal lies, rhetoric, and purges, and these are to be administered by the most virtuous and hence the most just citizens. There is no equivalent in Plato to the Stoic doctrine of living harmoniously in accord with nature, a doctrine that is so castigated by Nietzsche.

I note parenthetically that in the Romantic period, of which the twentieth century, for better and for worse, is a distorted continuation, there comes into view a doctrine of living in accord with nature understood as the countryside in opposition to the city. I suppose that Rousseau is as responsible for this doctrine as anyone; it is clear, however, that this is not a political but an anti-political teaching, and that it too points to the underlying notion of a divided human nature. Rousseau was both the citizen of Geneva and the solitary promenader. This of course is not the Platonic view; in the *Phaedrus*, Socrates makes it clear that philosophy belongs to the city rather than to the countryside or the natural landscape, to mention only the decisive point. If it is true in a general sense that Plato accepts the view of human being as by nature political, the fact remains that human nature is divided against itself. What Socrates calls "the healthy and just character" of the philosophical nature, which hates the lie in the soul and avoids the chorus of evils that follow the many nonphilosophers (VI, 490b8-c6), must regulate the erotic madness of the many by its own erotic madness. What is the tyranny of intemperance in the many is to be transformed into the tyranny of sobriety in the few.

In sum: according to Plato, the human being must be modified by philosophical *technē*, and this includes philosophical rhetoric; the human being is sick by nature and must be healed by philosophical psychiatry, in order to live in a properly constructed city. The citizen

is a work of art, not of course a perfect work of art but one in which the inner contradiction of human nature can be contained within a harmony induced by the right kind of *paideia* for as long as possible. I can now refine my thesis about Plato as follows. The city as such is natural in the sense that it comes into existence because the individual human being is not autarchic but has need of others (II, 369b5 ff.). But there is no perfection of *praxis* or political virtue by nature, as there is for Aristotle. In the previously cited extreme formulation of Socrates at *Republic* VI, 500d4-9, the philosopher will be a good demiurge, i.e., artisan, "of temperance, justice, and all of demotic virtue." Temperance and justice are the key political virtues, but they are part of demotic or vulgar virtue, which is to say that they are fashioned by political demiurges, and in the wished-for case, by the philosophical demiurge.

I believe we can now see why it is a complete mistake to take one's bearings by the expulsion of the mimetic poets in attempting to understand Plato's *Republic*. The mimetic poets are expelled because they are to be replaced by the philosopher-kings, not because poetry is to be replaced by mathematics or dialectic. This is why we cannot take literally or narrowly Socrates' remarks to the effect that he and his interlocutors are not poets but *oikistai poleōs*, "builders of the city" (II, 378e7). They are indeed *builders*; as such, they must abstain from all other demiurgic arts and be *dēmiourgous eleutherias tēs poleōs*, "demiurges of the city's freedom" (III, 395b8-c1). That this art is not to be carried through in meter or verse is irrelevant (see III, 393d8). It is a poetic or productive art; the name "demiurge" is in one sense of course metaphorical, but the point of the metaphor is to make explicit the constructive nature of the art of philosophical politics.

So much for the terminology of the *Republic*, examples of which could easily be multiplied to confirm the points I have made. I turn now to the *Statesman*, which is usually thought to be a dialogue of Plato's later years, where the Eleatic Stranger replaces Socrates as the main interlocutor. I can only mention here that one meaning of this shift is to indicate the more theoretical or as we would say "abstract" nature of the treatment of politics in the *Statesman* as

compared with that in the *Republic*. The very success of the *Republic*, which is due to its resemblance to a kind of comprehensive novel in the style of Tolstoy, has prevented many readers from noticing that it is indeed a philosophical novel, even a fairy tale about the relation between philosophy and politics. We have been deluded on the one hand by Socrates' criticism of mimetic poetry, and on the other by the magic of Plato's mimetic poetry, and so failed to notice that, with all of its discussion of the Ideas, the good, and the role of mathematics in a philosophical education, the *Republic* is a poetical presentation of the problem of philosophical politics.

However this may be, the Eleatic Stranger makes entirely prosaic the Socratic view of politics as demiurgic, rhetorical, or constructive. The central paradigm, or as we would say today, model, of the art of politics is the art of weaving.² Weaving makes artificial products like curtains, blankets, and cloaks in order to protect the body from the painful and destructive effects of nature. As the Stranger formulates his final definition of the art of politics, the statesman "rules all of the arts and cares for the laws and everything in the city and weaves them all together most effectively" (305e2–6). The statesman is not a creator *ex nihilo*. Just as the weaver is furnished with wool by nature, so the statesman is furnished by nature with the fundamental materials of the city, namely, two types of human natures (306e9 ff.), one courageous and sharp, the other moderate and gentle.

These two human types are in a certain manner enemies; a condition of political discord (*stasis*) exists between them. In other words, nature furnishes the philosopher-statesman with discordant materials and leaves it to him to harmonize them or weave them together into a city, which is artificial in the fundamental sense that it is not supplied by nature, and in particular not by our *political* nature. We are by nature enemies, and our cities, unless respun by the philosophical weaver, are in the natural condition of revolution. As a consideration of the subsequent description of political weaving would show, the philosopher stands to the city as does the divine artificer of the *Timaeus* to the cosmos. It should also be mentioned that from 293b1 almost to the end of the dialogue, the Stranger regularly compares politics with medicine.

The conclusion about weaving together different natures does not deviate substantially from that of the *Republic* (see for example III, 410d1 ff.; the philosophers must harmonize the hard and the soft natures by a judicious mixture of gymnastics and music), but it does bring out certain ambiguities that are left undiscussed and even unmentioned in the "earlier," Socratic presentation. I will give just one example. According to the Stranger, those who are by nature gentle or moderate try to live in an orderly and quiet way, *ta sphetera auton prattontes*, "tending to their own affairs" or "minding their own business" (307c9–e4). This is of course almost literally the definition of justice given by Socrates in the *Republic* (III, 433a1–b4). Socrates means that each of us ought to perform the basic type of work for which we are best suited, namely, philosophy, soldiering, or the arts and crafts, farming, and physical labor. But this is a matter of justice, and so of politics, not of personal happiness. Our goal is not to make even the guardians happy, although Socrates assures us that they will be, but rather to make the city as happy as possible (III, 419a1 ff.).

Apart from the absurdity of a happy city, and indeed one in which happiness is so variously enacted as in the *Republic*, it is clear that in the crucial case, that of the guardians, Socrates intends "one's own" to be interpreted as strictly as possible to mean "the city." In the *Statesman*, on the other hand, "one's own" means whatever makes one personally content or happy. To recur to a previous point, let us assume that it is just in the beautiful city for philosophers to be compelled to rule rather than to devote themselves to the study of philosophy in their private capacities. In order to make this assumption, we must also assume that by shifting from that at which they are best, and which is the best life in itself, namely, philosophy, to something at which they may excel but which is neither best in itself nor does it constitute their personal happiness, the philosopher-kings exemplify justice, or minding their own business, by not minding their own business but that of everyone else, and so by exercising *polupragmosunē* or injustice.

Even on the basis of these assumptions, it remains the case that justice and happiness are not entirely compatible. Perhaps even more

important, however, from a political standpoint, is the fact that the correct political interpretation of "minding one's own business" requires violence to be effected upon the sense of "one's own." The problem was clear in the *Republic* as early as Book II, 375a2 ff. The guardians must be both sharp or courageous, and so cruel to enemies, but also gentle to friends. In order to support his contention that the mixture of these attributes is not contrary to nature, Socrates cites the example of the noble hound who barks at strangers and is gentle to friends. The choice of a beast as the paradigm of human nature is obviously a joke, not to mention a circular one, since the political attributes of dogs have undoubtedly been inculcated into them by generations of breeding and training. But it is in any case silently rejected by the subsequent reliance upon education of body and soul in order to produce by art what nature herself cannot supply.

It makes no difference that the best interests of the courageous and the moderate alike are served by a harmonious city. The main point is that no such city can arise, or if it arises, last for more than a short interval, unless it has been woven together by the royal art of the statesman. I repeat: the materials are furnished by nature, but not the city. Human beings are by nature enemies, very much as Thomas Hobbes, the ostensible founder of modern political philosophy, who was of course only following Machiavelli, said that they are. To come back to the *Statesman*, the Stranger tells us that the two kinds of human natures "are always marked by the greatest enmity and stasis with respect to each other" and so that "not the least parts of virtue differ from each other by nature, as do the deeds of those who possess them" (308b2-8). This passage is important because it differs from the usual Socratic contention that the virtues are one. The difference can be partly removed by noting that Socrates regards virtue as knowledge; in other words, all virtues other than wisdom are demotic or not genuine virtues. As he says in the *Republic* at VII, 518d9-e3, the so-called virtues, namely, those other than intelligence (*phronēsis*), are close to those of the body and are produced by habituation and exercise. But that does not alter the political situation. Neither nature nor political prudence in the usual or non-philosophical sense will overcome this natural split between

human kinds. That task can be performed by the philosopher alone, the royal weaver, as we may call him.

One has to underline in red the important conclusion that for Plato there is no such thing as political virtue in the Aristotelian sense. There is no practical virtue as distinguished from theoretical and productive virtue. On the contrary, there are only theory and production; this is the principle in accord with which the arts and sciences are regularly classified in the Platonic dialogues. And it remains a deep question in Plato, seldom noticed but nevertheless of crucial importance, whether politics is a theoretical or a practical art. In the division of the arts in the *Statesman*, the interlocutors begin by classifying the statesman under the epistemonik men, i.e. those who are knowers rather than makers (258e4 ff.). But the dialogue culminates in a comparison of the statesman to the weaver or maker, and it is this paradigm that is followed subsequently. I cannot go into the extraordinary intricacy of the intermediate steps, which I dissect in my book on the *Statesman*, but the result is plain. Just as diaeresis is constructive in the modern sense of the term because it makes new concepts like that of the art of tending horned herd-animals, or whatever else is necessary to the intentions of the diaeretician, so too politics is not pure gnosis but at the same time construction. The very least one could say (in the terminology of the *Statesman*) is that politics is the art of commanding for the sake of a genesis. We cannot simply say that the city requires guardians who exhibit the paradigm of the noble hound; we must construct a new type of human being by devising a sound set of procedures which are furnished not by political prudence but by the madness of philosophy.

The *Statesman* is a maddeningly obscure as well as a perversely amusing dialogue. It forces us to consider the political analogues of carding and combing wool, as well as of arts like that of the fuller, the mender, and the launderer of clothing. But the central image is not difficult to decipher. The statesman is neither a shepherd of a herd nor a captain of the ship of state, two metaphors for the royal art of politics that are initially suggested and then rejected or radically modified. Herds are not cities, nor are their members human beings; the captain does not participate in the building of his ship

nor is he responsible for the deeds performed by his passengers when they reach their destination. Of the many paradigms entertained in the *Statesman*, perhaps that of the architect comes closest to the central figure of the weaver. Both make clear the need to construct artifacts for the protection of the human race against nature. In this sense there is a genuine anticipation of the theme of the modern Enlightenment, although self-defense rather than mastery is the central issue.

I said above that the *Statesman* is more theoretical than the *Republic*. The Stranger makes it clear that the purpose of his conversation about politics is not political but is rather intended to make his pupils "more dialectical" (*dialektikoteros*) about everything. The stated purpose of the *Republic*, on the other hand, is to persuade Glaucon and Adeimantus that the just life is intrinsically more choiceworthy than the unjust life. Everything said by Socrates in this dialogue is accommodated to the understanding and desires of his youthful interlocutors, including the treatment of topics like the Ideas and the good (VI, 504b1–8, 509c3 f.). Whereas dialectic is the peak of education within the guardian class of the beautiful city (VII, 534e2), it can only be described metaphorically, in images like that of the sun, to Glaucon and his companions. The Stranger, on the other hand, is training in the first instance young mathematicians; he engages in extended exercises of diaeresis if not in Socratic dialectic, and he discusses at some length such topics as paradigms and measurement. Throughout this dialogue, the emphasis is upon theoretical construction, another example of how the *Statesman* is surprisingly modern in its themes, despite the archaic form of its rhetoric. I do not want to overstate this point, but it is nevertheless true to a considerable extent that the *Republic* emphasizes the link between mathematics and the eternal, whereas the *Statesman* emphasizes concept-construction or more generally, the constructive nature of the method of diaeresis and conceptual analysis.

One could also say that poetry dominates the presentation of eternity in the *Republic*, whereas in the *Statesman*, eternity is represented predominantly if not always as changing, and in particular in the great myth of the reversed cosmos. It would be very foolish

to attempt to draw general inferences about Plato's doctrines from these brief comparisons of the two dialogues, or for that matter from the more extended sample of evidence contained in my lecture as a whole. I have hoped to show, or at least to make plausible the claim that Plato views human being as divided in nature and hence as by nature incomplete, *das noch nicht festgestellte Tier*, as Zarathustra expresses a related thought. This is the teaching of the Greek tragedians, and this is the most important link between Nietzsche's psychology and that of Plato. In this connection, I add that whatever one may think of Nietzsche's criticism of Socrates and his ostensibly anti-dramatic rationalism, Nietzsche does not identify Socrates with Plato as do so many less perceptive classicists.

I want to take up one last point. Since this is in effect my peroration, I ask you to indulge a very general reflection. The fundamental tension in Platonism is that of the possibility of constructing a political artifact in the light of eternal order. I have tacitly suggested that Plato shows us in the two quite different images of the *Republic* and the *Statesman* the same underlying need to create by poetry and philosophical rhetoric a city that serves to protect human beings against themselves as well as the hostile characteristics of the cosmos. Whatever may be the ontological truth about the Platonic Ideas, they serve what most of us would call a "conservative" political function, and the same is finally true of the various technical exercises of the Eleatic Stranger. I hesitate to use the term "conservative" because I do not wish to invoke contemporary political ideologies. I use it to designate the posture of self-defense against nature.

At the same time, it should never be forgotten that Plato, through Socrates, takes the most revolutionary single step in the history of our race; he introduces the paradigm of the philosopher-king. The history of political philosophy, at least in the West, is the dialectical interplay of the revolutionary and the defensive or conservative elements in Plato's thought. The shift from the ancients to the moderns can be briefly described as the shift on the part of the philosopher-kings, thanks to the instruments of mathematical and experimental science, from the defensive to the offensive.

Aristotle, who is as sober as Plato is mad, avoids revolution by the separation of theory from practice as well as production. In so doing, he comes much closer to the Stoic notion of living in accord with nature, but only, I think, at the price of suppressing the problems that are so vividly if at the same time ambiguously presented in the Platonic dialogues. I sometimes wonder whether the doctrine that man is by nature the political animal is not Aristotle's noble lie, and whether his soothing rhetoric is not intended to function as the genuine political medicine that replaces and corrects the damage instilled by Plato's excessively daring pharmaceutical recipes.

It is a long story but it would be very rewarding to make a detailed study of why the modern scientific and by extension political revolution begins under the flag of Plato rather than Aristotle. I have tried to tell a part of that story here by bringing out a side to Plato that is seldom given its due, namely, his constructivism and his perception of the uneasy residence of human being within a nature that is hostile as much as it is friendly to our healthy existence. With all due acknowledgment of Aristotle's genius, I believe that we have more to learn from Plato at this juncture of late modernity (late at least for us). Under no circumstances, however, would I wish to be understood as suggesting that part of what we need to learn is how to construct a healthy city, if this is taken to mean an endorsement of the beautiful city of the *Republic*, which is neither beautiful nor a genuine city on its own criterion of unity.

So much, then, about the underlying harmony between poetry and philosophy, at least from the standpoint of politics, or what could perhaps be referred to as Plato's doctrine of practico-production. Another discussion would be required to present an analogous survey of the constructive elements in Platonic theory.

Notes

- 1 "The Role of Eros in Plato's *Republic*" in *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry: Studies in Ancient Thought* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
- 2 For details, see my *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995; Reprint: South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2004).

CHAPTER SEVEN

Dynamis, Energeia and the Megarians

In this paper, I shall summarize a series of arguments taken from a more extensive analysis of Aristotle's treatment of non-being. That analysis is itself intended to serve as a foundation for studying the ostensible resolution of the problem of non-being in contemporary analytical philosophy. My paper will be divided into three parts. I begin with a sketch of a critical aporia in Aristotle's doctrine of predication. If my sketch is sound, the implications for contemporary philosophy will be easy to see. In the second part I shall offer some general observations on the senses of *dynamis* and *energeia* in everyday discourse. These observations begin from a consideration of the Aristotelian text and the pre-theoretical situation as it was accessible to Aristotle and is still accessible to us. The doctrine of predication is itself based upon an analysis of everyday discourse and, despite the logical revolution of the present century, continues to play a central role in contemporary philosophy. In the third part of my paper I shall discuss Aristotle's criticisms of the Megarian thesis and attempt to formulate them in such a way as to show that Aristotle has not refuted it.

I

According to Aristotle, technical and scientific knowledge is of the "through what" or cause.¹ Knowledge arises when we can answer the question: why does one thing follow from another in such-and-such a way? Stated still more precisely, knowledge explains why one thing *belongs* to another. The owner is the subject of predication; its property is an attribute. Knowledge is contained in the definition of the essence (*to ti ēn einai*) of the owner, i.e., of the species-form (*eidos*) or second *ousia*.² A scientific demonstration "points out" the essential properties belonging to the *ousia*.³ This "pointing out" follows the schemata of the categories or the

classification of attributes in determining which are essential (*kath' hauta*).⁴ The categories may themselves be divided into the *ousia* and all the others, which others classify essential properties of the former.⁵ The verb *is*, when used predicatively, thus points out an *ousia* as a thus-and-such, i.e., as the owner of a given (and in scientific knowledge, essential) attribute. But it does not exhibit directly the *ousia*. The *ousia* or subject of predication is accessible through sensation or intellectual intuition (*noēsis*). Indeed, we must first intuit the *eidos* or *ousia* before we can make a predicating assertion about it.⁶

Discursive science (*epistēmē dianoētikē*),⁷ then, is in one sense predicative, but in another, prepredicative. We cannot say something of something until we see *what* we are talking about. There are, as it were, no rules to tell us how to apply the rules of predication. The *what* (the *ousia* or *eidos*) is not the predicatively accessible structure of owner plus essential attributes. Predicative or discursive thinking follows an order of posterior and prior. If this belongs to *that*, then *that* is (in the context) logically prior to *this*. But as Aristotle says: "there is no order in the *ousia*. For how could we be compelled to intuit (*noēsai*) posterior and prior?"⁸ The unity of the *ousia* is not the sum of the list of its elements. Man, for example, is not composed of "animal" plus "two-footed."⁹ But neither is the unity of *ousia* like a point or monad, since then we could not distinguish one from another. It is rather "an *entelecheia* and kind of nature."¹⁰ Now a kind of nature is presumably a way of being, distinguishable from other ways. But how can we distinguish one way of being from other such ways antecedent to predication? How could we convey, to ourselves or another, the content of our intuition of the owner of the properties present to discourse? This is an aporia. What counts as an essential predication is determined, not by *dianoia* or discursive demonstration but by intuition. Yet the content of the intuition cannot be the properties about to be classified as essential or inessential, and it is surely absurd to suggest that they are a set of some other properties. So in the crucial case of the essence or *ousia* we can never say what we have seen but only what belongs to it. The identification of such-and-such predicates as essential is clearly a circular procedure.

In the history of philosophy the situation just sketched led first to the doctrine of invisible essences and then to the abandonment of essences outright. Thanks to the flourishing of modal logic, however, essences have become a live topic in contemporary philosophy. Obviously the concept of necessity and possibility makes no sense unless we can distinguish between essential and accidental attributes and so identify essences. Saul Kripke has recently defended the doctrine of essences, unfortunately not too extensively or clearly, in part because he takes an essence to be of an individual rather than of a species. Kripke's enterprise has required him to rehabilitate, again all too briefly, the doctrine of intuition.¹¹ One should perhaps not place too much stress on transcriptions of oral remarks. But this is what Kripke has chosen to publish, and the elaborations of his disciples and followers do nothing to resolve the problem. Kripke claims that the distinction between essential and accidental properties is intuitively sound and remarks of intuitive content that "I really don't know in a way what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking."¹² One may sympathize with the burden of this remark and yet note that it is at best ambiguous. Surely Kripke recalls as well as anyone alive the case of mathematics, in which intuition is both regularly invoked and also condemned as leading to paradoxes and contradictions. In the case of a proof, it may be that the consequences of an intuition certify it *a posteriori* as sound or unsound. But if we must rely upon intuition to identify essences and hence to certify some set of attributes as essential, we can scarcely use the attributes to validate the soundness of the intuition. Kripke himself identifies essential properties as the origin of an object, the substance of which it is made, or in sum, the scientific statement of what a thing *is*.¹³

This is not a promising line of approach to the problem of essences. In the case of Aristotle, there are two assumptions which, if we accept them, make his doctrine defensible. First, he claims that we can intuit the way of being of an *eidos* in advance of what science says and as the precondition of scientific description. If scientific description could in fact identify essential attributes, intuition would be superfluous. Second, scientific knowledge as embodied

in intuition is for Aristotle permanent. The identification of a set of attributes as essential is not subject to historical change, ideological fashion, human perspectives, and so on. If I understand his cryptic remarks correctly, Kripke is engaged in the self-contradictory attempt to validate a doctrine of intuition on historical, and even historicist, grounds. The problem is not, as Kripke seems to think, the false dilemma of whether the abstract object is "behind the bundle of qualities" or "nothing but the bundle."¹⁴ He is right to deny that either is the case but wrong (or too cryptic) in saying that the solution is that the table, for example, *has* properties but is not identical to a bundle of these properties. The basic difficulty is that Kripke has not explained what it means to *have* properties or (differently stated) what it means for something to belong essentially to something else. Even if it were possible to avoid the historical and contingent status of scientific statements it would remain true that there is a difference between intuiting an essence to certify predication and turning to a scientific exposition of predicates to be certified. So it is not satisfactory to refer to the substance from which a thing originates as its essence. If the substance is intuited, science is superfluous. If it is ascertained by science we convert an essence into a historical construction. These remarks leave untouched the *logical* procedure of defining an essence as the set of properties something must have in order to be correctly certified or identified as that same thing in all possible worlds. They leave it untouched because the statements of a logical calculus are not empirically informative. They do not tell us anything whatsoever about the essence of any actual object.

For Aristotle, to know is to be able to state the "through what." Discursive knowledge is analytical in the sense that it can tell us why a man is a such-and-such but not why a man is a man. There is no rationally accessible cause or ground "through which" a man is a man. To ask for such a ground is in fact to ask for a statement of identity. The man as *ousia* or owner of properties must first be evident before scientific inquiry can begin.¹⁵ Aristotle's doctrine of predication or "belonging to" (*hiparchein*) cannot serve as the sole basis for a rigorous analytical explanation of knowledge because analytical thinking presupposes the intelligibility of the concept of

belonging. If we make "belonging" a primitive relation, we can then define sets of properties by means of criteria for identifying what belongs to then, but this simply returns us to the genuine dilemma of a choice between essentialism and linguistic conventionalism. There seems to be no analytical way of distinguishing between essential and accidental attributes. To analyze is to divide, whereas the essential attributes belong to the *ousia* in such a way as to constitute the unity or being of the thing under investigation. But there is no "through which" to serve as the ground of unity or essential identity. The senses of unity correspond to those of being and these in turn are classified by the categories, which fall into two classes, of which one is *ousia* and the other its attributes. So nothing can be said of the unity of *ousia* (in the sense that to say something of something is to predicate) expect to name its essence. To say more than this is to sort out its attributes and so to separate the *ousia* from those attributes. A doctrine of predication, if it is to avoid the dissolution of what it attempts to identify, must be supplemented by something like a Kantian doctrine of synthetic unity. However, such a doctrine is subject to the same difficulties as is the Aristotelian doctrine of intuition. In the Aristotelian account there is a fundamental gap of unspeakableness between the first category and the others. This seriously compromises Aristotle's doctrine of being as a *pros hen legomenon*. That is: if the various senses of "to be" are derived from or with respect to the sense of *ousia*, whereas we cannot actually say anything of *ousia* itself but can only speak "about" it, then what we say "about" *ousia* is actually derived from the other categories. The situation is the reverse of what Aristotle claims it to be.

I want next to show the connection between the aporia of predication and the problems of *energeia* and non-being. This can best be done by considering Aristotle's remarks on negation and privation in the fourth book of the *Metaphysics*. Negation (*apophasis*) and privation (*sterēsis*) are defined there with respect to a unity, i.e., an *ousia* that serves as the subject of predication.¹⁶ Negation may take two forms. The first and simple form is the assertion that unity does not belong to the given subject: the second form is the assertion that unity does not belong to a given genus. This means that negation

takes the form "*S is not P*" where *S* is deprived of the unity of which *P* is ingredient, or is marked by the absence (*apousia*) of *P*. In the case of privation, the absence of *P* disqualifies *S* from being identified as a species within a given genus. As Aristotle says, "the difference is present in the unity, apart from the content of the negation."

We should also note briefly Aristotle's distinction between "difference" (*diaphora*) and "otherness" (*heterōtēs*). Otherness is co-ordinate to sameness and so applies to everything with respect to everything else, whereas difference is a distinction "in some respect," namely, with respect to the absence of an attribute in a species. This absence both prevents one species from being another and plays an essential role in making it what it is.¹⁷ Among the several interesting consequences that follow from the fact that "the difference is present in the unity" of the genus, I note one. Two genera may be other than but not different from each other.¹⁸ This is related to the logical impossibility of a *summum genus* and raises the further difficulty that we cannot make a scientific statement about the essential otherness of one genus from another, since that would require a genus common to and higher than both. The logical inaccessibility of a *summum genus* means that the world's unity is analogical only.¹⁹ It therefore looks as though the unity of the whole is conceptual in the sense of a thought to which no determinate logical structure corresponds. For even if God's perpetual self-thinking is assigned the role of keeping the cosmos actualized, man cannot grasp noetically an *eidos* of that actuality.

However this may be, if negation in its simple or complex form refers to the absence of an attribute from an *ousia*, then affirmation must refer to the presence of an attribute in an *ousia*. The *apousia* in question is not of the subject of a negative predication, at least not in the case of scientific knowledge. In negations of this sort the privation is intrinsic to the *ousia*,²⁰ but the *ousia* remains, even in the absence of the negated difference, as the unity of its genus in and through the exclusion of a single definite entity. We see again the circularity of the doctrine of predication since present and absent attributes are both distinct from and identified via the *ousia*.²¹ Aristotle's terminology seems to provide a classical anticipation of Heidegger's contention that Being reveals itself in the concealed form of being.

An affirmative statement (*kataphasis*) does not "bespeak" the *ousia* itself but speaks about it via the presence of an attribute. Essential negation or privation, then, is co-ordinate with essential affirmation. If privation is the absence of a property, then the presence of a property is obviously the actualization of a potentiality (i.e., the privation) ingredient in the unity of the genus. The *parousia* is then an *energeia*. But the *ousia* must be both present and intrinsically or scientifically unspeakable within both the affirmation and the negation. If so, then there must be an *energeia* of essential attributes distinct from the *energeia* of the *ousia*.²²

I now summarize this section of my analysis. Scientific knowledge is of the form of a being. Since no form corresponds to pure absence or nothingness, Aristotle is led to define nothingness as negation. "Not" means "non" in the sense that *S* is non-*P*. The *ousia* *S* continues to be present as the owner of its attributes which, as I have suggested, are also present and accessible to discourse. The sense of negation is thus dependent upon the senses of *S* and *P*, which are related syntactically in such a way as to exclude ownership of *P* by *S*. The force of "non" is therefore purely syntactical. The fundamental defect of this proposal to resolve the problem of non-being should now be clear. It turns upon our capacity to distinguish the *ousia* from its attributes, or to distinguish between the content of intuition and predicative discourse. And such a distinction is scientifically inaccessible. Furthermore, if we cannot bespeak the *ousia* but can only speak "about" it via its *parousiai*, then there are two distinguishable senses of *energeia*. And so *energeia-ousia*, as scientifically unspeakable, is indistinguishable from nothingness or to *mēdamōs on*, and Aristotle has failed to solve the problem bequeathed to philosophy by Parmenides. Consequently no scientific distinction has been drawn between *energeia* and *dynamis*. And therefore Aristotle has failed to refute the Megarian claim that *dynamis* and *energeia* are simultaneous or in effect the same.

II

As part of a more direct inspection of Aristotle's refutation of the Megarians, I offer the following remarks on *dynamis* and *energeia*.

Although Aristotle begins his own discussion with *dynamis*, it seems *prima facie* easier, given his doctrines, to begin with *energeia*. The first question is how to translate the Greek term. It is normally rendered by "actuality" or "activity." The problem here is that "actuality" normally refers to an activity's consequence, whereas *energeia* includes both. It has also been suggested that we translate *energeia* more fully as "being at work." Unfortunately this is circular, since *energeia* presumably designates the primary sense of "being." I doubt that we shall find an altogether satisfactory rendering of this term in English because its Greek sense is both connected to the two meanings of *ergon* (work as activity and as product) and inseparable from Aristotle's doctrine of *ousia*. We cannot even say unambiguously that *energeia* is the kind of work in which the activity and its product are inseparable, since this is the way in which Aristotle defines *praxis*. Let us then proceed indirectly through a reflection on what it normally means to work.

In early Greek, the word *argos* means "not doing one's work," of which the most important example is perhaps not tilling the soil. By extension the word can mean "lazy." The pair *argos-ergon* thus takes us back to a situation in which no distinction is drawn between practice and production. To do one's work is to produce whatever men need, whether in farming, household management, or in war. Work is thus linked to necessity and excellence. A man shows himself, what he is made of, his "substance," in work. This notion underlies the regular Greek distinction between speeches and deeds. A man can say one thing and do another: what counts is the deed. Speeches may conceal, but work reveals: it is what it shows itself to be. Speeches may be true or false but in order to know which, we must compare them with deeds. If a man's work is making speeches, then he is either an acknowledged liar, e.g., a poet, or a political orator whose words are judged by their practical consequences. Even poets, of course, work in the service of the gods. Rhetoricians, sophists and philosophers are dangerous precisely to the degree that their words cannot be measured by deeds. Perhaps this is why 20th century thinkers tend to prefer pragmatism in one form or another to "speculative" metaphysics, and to define theory

as construction rather than as looking. Apparently deeds show the truth whereas speeches merely promise it. In this sense *dynamis* seems to be closer to speech than is *energeia*.

Work is thus both necessary and manifest whereas speech, strictly speaking, is neither. And the Athenian praise for good talkers was almost invariably in terms of utility. The love of talk for its own sake seems to have been a mark of the idle sons of wealthy families and their cunning corruptors. But even these cunning few promised that their speech would be useful in obtaining blessedness. Here too the excellence of the activity was measured by its product. The product is the fulfillment (*entelecheia*) of work as activity. In this sense, *logos* is fulfilled in *energeia*. The products of the activity of natural genesis and artificial production fulfill that activity but may also be separated from them. For example, we use flowers as decorations and signs, neutered animals as pets, and so on. Living things may be detached from the *dynamis* of generation. If we shift from the individual to the species, however, Aristotle's meaning becomes clearer. The work of genesis, as manifested in the continuous presence of the species-form, is not separable from that presence. However, what reproduces is not the species-form but the corporeal individual. The work of physical reproduction is thus not in itself the work that produces the *energeia*, which is of course not generated but eternal. The work of genesis thus has two dimensions which do not simply correspond to the difference between form and matter but are marked off by that difference. These dimensions are the sexual generation of the individual and the self-presentational work of the species-form. The situation is then parallel to that of predication. We must make our discursive approach to the species via the individual. The work of the species culminates in the presence of an individual that it cannot itself produce.

Either Aristotle is guilty of the separation of essence from its instances or else presentational work of the species depends upon the life and work of the material instance. This is a parallel to the everyday sense in which the promise of *logos* is fulfilled in the deed, but it is not a very satisfactory one for Aristotle. For this makes the *energeia* of the species a generated individual or still worse an

unspeakable phantom projected from an invisible source. And if the individuals in the world are themselves the fulfillment of *energeia*, then it is senseless to say that the product and the activity of *energeia* are inseparable. I note in passing that recourse to Aristotle's doctrine of thinking will only compound the problem. For example, if divine *noēsis tēs noēseōs* is invoked to actualize the species-form, the latter are thereby deprived of their ostensible capacity to fulfill their own promise, whether simply by showing themselves or in their generated products.

I think enough has been said to show that the apparently greater clarity of *energeia* when compared to *dynamis* is specious. Let us turn to *dynamis*. The word has two primary meanings: (1) the power or capacity to do something; (2) the *possibility* that something can be other than what it is. In the first sense a strong skilled man is a good fighter whether or not he is actually fighting, and a king is capable of punishing even if he is not actually doing so. These examples bring out a crucial fact. Frightening one's opponents merely by being visible or by being in a position to cow the law-breaker are both consequences of what one now is, not of what one may become. To be powerful means to be *actually* powerful; in this sense it is hard if not impossible to distinguish *dynamis* from *energeia*. In the second sense of *dynamis* the prince regent may become but is not yet king. Stone may become but is not yet a statue, and so on. Whether one can say in all such cases that the potential X has the power to become X, I leave an open problem. In addition, as has been carefully shown by J. Hintikka,²³ Aristotle does not define what he means by "possibility" in a single way. I shall mention only one or two raised by Hintikka. The use of "possible" in contemporary modal logic is related to this sense of *dynamis* but is not synonymous with it. In ordinary use, and certainly in Aristotle, to say that something is possible is to say that it could happen in this world, not that we can conceive of another world differing from this one in such-and-such a way. Whether this difference is overcome by Kripke's advice not to think of actually existing possible worlds but rather possible situations in this world, I do not know. As I just put the point, one could

object that it makes no sense to speak of actual possible worlds. On the other hand possible variations in this world are for Aristotle rooted in an antecedent actuality: in species-forms now present in the one-and-only world. Hintikka takes Aristotle to mean that in addition to this, every individual possibility *will* be actualized at one time or another.²⁴ I have some doubts that this is right, but it is apparently supported by the doctrine of the eternity of the world. And this raises great difficulties for a modal logic, despite the fact that Aristotle is apparently the founder of the subject.

For our present purposes we can put this difficulty to one side.²⁵ We do not want to know whether every possibility must actualize, but rather the ontological residence of each possibility antecedent to actualization. I therefore return to the two main senses of *dynamis*. In both cases, power and possibility, if we look to the *dynamis* alone the product or fulfillment of work is not yet present. The power stored in the king's title or in a boxer's fist is not the same as punishment or a punch. Similarly the potentiality of stone to become a statue is not a distinct *ousia* but belongs to the *ousia* of stone just as the king's power to act belongs to the *ousia* of the king. There are then two different senses of "belonging to" here, corresponding to the main senses of *dynamis*. First, the power of the king is not just an essential attribute but itself expresses fully what it means to be a king. It therefore becomes difficult if not impossible to say what is the difference between owning the power of kingship and actually being a king. In the second sense, a possibility may belong to an *ousia* but it cannot do so essentially. It is not an essential attribute of stone to become a statue, and similarly with all possible states of corporeal individuals. Once more we see that either the concept of belonging is indistinguishable from the concept of an essence, or else the former concept is useless in identifying exactly what we mean by an essence.

The first sense of belonging corresponds to *dynamis qua* power and is employed in our attempt to define the *ousia* by any of its most fundamental or comprehensive attributes. We derive our standard of what is fundamental from the ancient commonsense belief that deeds are more reliable than speeches.

The fundamental attribute of a thing is what permits it to do its work. If we deny that one power is identifiably more fundamental than another, we admit that there is no essential expression of the *ousia*. But if we assert that there is such a fundamental power, then this is indistinguishable from the *ousia*. And so we seem to be forced to arbitrary linguistic constructions of what a thing ought to be taken essentially to be.

The second sense of belonging corresponds to *dynamis qua* possibility or, to compound the difficulty, to the power to become what a thing is not yet. As I previously hinted, it could be argued a potentiality to become X is not simply a privation of X ingredient in some *ousia* or *energeia* but that it represents a capacity actually present in the thing. For example the physical strength of a boxer, the family and legal status of a king, and the sculptable properties of stone are all present in the respective beings. And they are present as power to do or become something that is not yet present. So it is open to dispute whether the second sense of belonging itself belongs to the first sense of belonging. And this dispute cannot be settled by making "belonging" a primitive term or relation.

In my opinion there is no non-circular analysis of the concept of belonging. And this supports the position of the Megarians. As they might argue, we cannot fully understand what we mean by "the possibility of X" by defining it as a privation or absence (*apousia*). For in this case a possible X becomes an actual X thanks to the work of the *ousia* in which the privation inheres, i.e., to which it belongs or in which it is present. But how can that which is not, namely, the privation, be present, if to be present is to be, and to be is to be an *eidos* or *parousia* in an *ousia*? When we refer to a *dynamis* as a privation, are we not just saying that the actual *dynamis* is the power inherent in the *ousia* designated as the owner of the privation? If we do say this, then we are Megarians. If privation is negation or a syntactic operator which does not refer to a being called "nothing" but to a range of species other than the one marked off by the negated differentia, then the privation or negation does not refer to the negated predicate at all but rather to the other species in the genus to which the differentia belongs. In the present case the

possibility of X, when labeled a privation "in" (= belonging to) an *ousia*, is in fact identified as that *ousia*, since nothing else could be meant by calling it a "power of" that *ousia*.

So the Megarian thesis rejects as unintelligible Aristotle's contention that the *dynamis* is "in" or "belongs to" the *energeia*. By parallel reasoning it rejects as inadequate Aristotle's doctrine of predication. This is to deny that Aristotle has solved the problem of non-being. For given his own analysis, Aristotle has not answered the question to what does the negated predicate refer in sentences of the form "S is non-P." It cannot refer to the property designated as P, since then "S is non-P" would be equivalent to "S is P." By hypothesis it does not refer to a being called "nothing." Therefore it must refer to the *ousia* designated as S. But S has a variety of predicates, none of which is explicitly mentioned by "non-P." If S alone or essentially is the reference of "non-P," then the force of the negation is to point out the inaccessible *ousia*. And so, as in negative theology, we can ostensibly refer to ultimate being only through negations. If there are no *ousiai* but only P's, i.e. if S is merely a placeholder for some analytically arbitrary conjunction of predicates, then being in the sense of "an arbitrary conjunction of predicates" is as much a syntactic operator as is negation. And in this case "non-P" refers to S, so that "S is non-P" is equivalent to "S is S" and hence to "S." The syntactic explanation of non-being thus terminates in ontological pointillisme or in Eleaticism, of which Megarianism is a version.

III

In the last part of my paper I will look briefly at the passages in which Aristotle deals explicitly with the Megarian thesis. In the space at my disposal I can make only some crucial points. In Θ 3, we are told that the Megarians say "that something has a *dynamis* only when it actualizes, but when it is not actual it has no *dynamis*."²⁶ For example the house-builder is able to build only when he is building. The Megarian objection surfaces in the treatment of *dynamis* because it is directed toward the denial of change and so primarily against kinetic possibility. Aristotle says that his thesis is patently absurd.²⁷ However, the Megarians claim to deny the cognitive distinctness of

dynamis apart from *energeia*, not the persuasiveness of the cognitively illusory phenomenon of change. The quarrel between Aristotle and the Megarians is like that between a phenomenologist and a conceptual analyst. The Megarian claims that the phenomena are theoretically incoherent, not that they fail to appear as they do. Aristotle cannot then refute him by saying that appearances are as they are. He must either deny the applicability of theory to the problem of appearance or to the distinction between change and rest and hence between being and non-being, or else he must provide a superior theory. Part of the difficulty is that Aristotle vacillates between providing phenomenological descriptions and attempting to explain the phenomena theoretically. I think his descriptions are inaccurate but in this paper I have been concentrating on the point that his theory is incoherent.

Stated with maximum concision the Megarians ask: where is the *dynamis*? Aristotle replies: in the *ousia*. In this case, however, the *dynamis* can only be "in," and indeed is indistinguishable from, the material substratum. Aristotle occasionally calls matter an *ousia*. Yet taken apart from form it must be, as a capacity to receive, an absence or privation of, form. No doubt Aristotle makes various vague attributions of "power" to matter, as H. Happ has maintained.²⁸ But the question is whether these attributions are consistent with the technical terms of Aristotle's theory. If to be intelligible is to be a form whereas matter is the capacity to receive form, how can Aristotle claim to know matter and so change?

Let us make use here of the distinction between power and possibility. The example of the house-builder can then be taken in two different ways. The Megarians may mean (1) that the house-builder has no possibility of building, except when he is actually doing so, (2) that his power to build is the same as his activity of building. As I noted above, it is not theoretically decisive to say that either contention fails to accord with the appearances. Aristotle's general objection to the Megarian thesis is very cryptic but it is surely a theoretical one: "If what has been deprived of its potentiality is incapable, what is not coming to be will be incapable of coming to be."²⁹ Aristotle's counterclaim invokes the

notion of time. I shall simplify the temporal aspect of the problem as much as possible. Suffice it to say that "genesis" is a shorthand term for the sequence of changes from *not yet* to *no longer*.³⁰ We must distinguish between the temporal succession and the eidetic content of genesis. Let us mentally position ourselves at the (itself unchanging) *now* and consider the case of the house-builder. We grant that *now* the house-builder is not building but plans to do so shortly and tells us so, while making the necessary arrangements. If the house-builder as *now not yet* building were to be deprived of his capacity to build, then he would be indistinguishable from a man who never possessed it but who was pretending to be on the verge of building.

It seems scarcely worth stating that those who are unable to perform a task will never do so. How might the Megarians respond? To begin with, there is something odd about the expression *now not yet*. It suggests that we are able to see both the past and the future while ensconced in the present. I think a closer look at this point would uncover difficulties for Aristotle similar to the ones I have already identified. I therefore pass it by for another point. Aristotle objects to the Megarians as follows: in order to start working, one must have the *dynamis* to do that work and the *dynamis* is chronologically distinct from the act of working. If this were not so, work would never begin, or alternatively it would never stop. As an analysis of the phenomenon of the individual case, this seems unanswerable. But a sophisticated Megarian might reply as follows. In order to start working, one must have the capacity to get started. But this capacity or power to work is itself dependent upon the antecedent capacity of acquiring the power to work, e.g., through study and practice. And that antecedent capacity is already dependent upon being a man. But this is very close to Aristotle's own account. It simply presses that account to its conclusion. The *energeia* is that of the species-form, and the *dynamis* are all "in" or "belong to" the material substratum of that form. But since the *energeia* is always present, or coextensive with temporality, it follows that actuality and potentiality must be simultaneous. It is no good appealing

to the phenomena, to our experience of individual workers who apparently start and stop various tasks at various times. What we want is not a description of the phenomena, or not that alone, but a theoretical explanation. Aristotle has himself attempted to supply one, but he tries to cover over its defects by appealing to the phenomena, whereas the correct procedure is the reverse, namely, to explain the phenomena by means of an adequate theory. In their approach to the problem of explaining alteration, both Aristotle and the sophisticated Megarian begin with a rejection of the altogether not. Alteration requires, both in the appearance and theoretically, that something come to be what it was not. The Megarian concludes that no theoretical explanation of "was not" is possible, and so that alteration is, if not an illusion, theoretically inexplicable. Aristotle attempts to explain "was not" and "will be" in terms of forms, and this is on his own telling inappropriate, since forms are extratemporal or else continuous with temporality altogether. Forms cannot alter; they own no potentialities. But it will not do to say that matter alters, either. This is because matter is visible or intuitable, and so discursively accessible, only as enformed. So the visibility of the alteration of matter is in fact the visibility of the presence and absence of forms, which is what was to be explained. Certainly Aristotle has not explained anything. Let me restate this. Matter is visible only as form, and negation is intelligible only if the difference between forms, the basis of alteration, is present in the *ousia* in as genuine a sense as the form itself. This presence cannot be that of matter which, as the receptive substratum of form, simply takes on its appearance. Aristotle's forms are deceptive because they appear to be matter, whereas his matter is deceptive because it appears to be form. This is an instance of what Hegel meant by the inverted world. Aristotle may not have been a Hegelian, but the fact remains that change and time appear as both formal and not formal, as both being and nothingness. If the not-yetness of an individual is explained theoretically as due to the non-union of a given form with given matter, then we are already denying appearance, which shows us the nothingness of the not-yet, awkward though that formulation may

sound. According to Aristotle a potentiality is always definite or for such-and-such. It is then defined by form instead of in itself.³¹ Hence matter is defined by form whereas the capacity of form to define the sensuous individual of genesis is itself attributed to matter. Therefore the possible being of the sensuous individual is dependent upon the antecedent unity of the form and matter. The possible being is dependent upon the actual being in question and not upon the actuality of some antecedent being. There is no way for Aristotle to account for the change from an antecedent being to the being in question. And this seems to mean that, theoretically speaking, whatever the appearances may claim, there cannot be any sensuous individuals at all. In order to come into being, the individual must already have come into being. Hence genesis or the production of sensuous individuals by the unending repetition of countably distinct unions of form and matter, is impossible. I can restate the reason for this in a slightly different way. For Aristotle, not to be so-and-so is the same as being so-and-so potentially, and this in turn is the same as actually being thus-and-such. That is, a not yet existing individual is actually the same as its parents. If the potentiality is in the matter, the actualizing must nevertheless be in the form. Therefore the non-existent individual must be actually the same as its parents. It is also potentially the same, but we cannot distinguish here between actuality and potentiality since the distinctness of matter depends upon the form.

To conclude: I have claimed that Aristotle fails to refute the Megarian thesis. The Megarian still has every right to insist that despite the facts of appearance, actuality and potentiality, even as described by Aristotle, must be simultaneous. As a Megarian might put it: "Aristotle says that 'man generates man' or that the species-form 'man' is always working. But this is our own thesis: there is no potentiality in man apart from his actuality. Since nothing comes from nothing, whatever is, is always."³² Aristotle's theory of change and genesis is expressed most directly in terms of *energeia* and *dynamis*. But this in turn rests upon his doctrine of predication, which had as its primary motivation, I believe, the desire to resolve the problem of non-being. However, it fails to do so because it is

unable to establish discursively the distinction between presence and absence, that is, between *energeia* and *dynamis*. The scientific unspeakability of *ousia* is also the scientific unspeakability of *energeia*. My contention has been that we cannot detach Aristotle's account of predication from his account of *energeia* and *dynamis*, and that if one is defective, so is the other. I have offered some reasons why both are defective and I add the suggestion that problems intrinsic to the doctrine of predication continue to be visible in contemporary philosophy. Aristotle's theoretical analysis of appearance is largely, or turns fundamentally upon, a series of linguistic distinctions. He attempts to explain complex phenomena by advising us to say "on the one hand this; on the other, that." But verbal distinctions do not constitute a theoretical deduction of appearances from underlying principles. In contemporary linguistic analysis, the doctrine of predication, taken apart from intuition, leads to conventionalism, and so finally to the denial of the cognitive difference between being and non-being. And this is the Megarian thesis.

Notes

- 1 *Metaphysics* A 1, 981a24 ff.; α 1, 993b23 ff.; Z 17, 1041a10 ff.
- 2 *Ibid.*, H 1, 1042a17.
- 3 *Ibid.*, E 1, 1025b14.
- 4 *Ibid.*, Δ 7, 1017a22.
- 5 *Ibid.*, Z 1, 1028a10 ff.
- 6 *Eth. Nic.* VI 11, 1143a35 ff.; *De Anima* III, 4–7 *passim* and esp. 7, 431 b3 ff.
- 7 *Metaphysics* E 1, 1025b6.
- 8 *Ibid.*, Z 12, 1038a33.
- 9 *Ibid.*, Z 3, 1043b4 ff.; 1044a7 ff.
- 10 *Ibid.*, Z 3, 1044a9.
- 11 "Naming and Necessity," in *Semantics of Natural Languages* ed. Davidson and Herman (Dordrecht: D. Riedel, 1972). Cf. L. Linsky, *Names and Descriptions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).
- 12 *Op. cit.*, p. 265.
- 13 *Ibid.*, pp. 314, 320.
- 14 *Ibid.*, p. 272.
- 15 *Metaphysics* Z 17, 1041a10 ff.
- 16 *Ibid.*, Γ 3, 1004a9–16 ff.
- 17 *Ibid.*, I 3, 1054b18 ff.
- 18 *Ibid.*, Δ 28, 1024a9 ff.

- 19 *Ibid.*, Δ 4–5.
- 20 *Ibid.*, Γ 6, 1011b18.
- 21 At Γ 2, 1004a14, Aristotle says that the difference is present (*proesti*) in the unity of the genus. In Δ 2, 1013b13–15, he explicitly contrasts *parousia* with *apousia* and *sterēsis* in discussing *aition*. Further, in *Physics* A 7, 191a3 ff., Aristotle speaks of the *parousia* and *apousia* of contraries in a substratum. I infer that the use of *parousia* as coordinate to *apousia* and as distinct from *ousia* is authentically Aristotelian.
- 22 In Aristotle's terminology, *energeia* and *ousia* (= species) are virtually synonymous. Cf. *Metaphysics* H3, 1043b1: *to gar ti ēn einai tōi eidei kai tēi energeiai hyparchei*.
- 23 *In Time and Necessity* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973).
- 24 *Ibid.*, pp. 105, 198.
- 25 See Hintikka's discussion on p. 113.
- 26 *hotan energēi monon dynasthai, hotan de mē energēi ou dunasthai*: 1046b29 f.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 1046b32 f.
- 28 *Hyle* (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 1971).
- 29 *Metaphysics* Θ 3, 1047a10.
- 30 In the well-known definition, time is the number of change with respect to before and after: *Physics* Δ 11, 219b1 f.
- 31 Θ 6, 1048a35 ff.
- 32 *Ibid.*, 1047a20.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Chasing the Chimaera

A review of the following books:

Seth Benardete. *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991)

H. G. Gadamer. *Plato's Dialectical Ethics: Phenomenological Interpretations Relating to the Philebus*, Translated and with an Introduction by Robert M. Wallace (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991)

Gregory Vlastos. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991)

I

The three books under review provide a striking testimonial to the enigmatic nature of the Platonic dialogues. One might almost suppose after a first reading that each of these books is devoted to a different personage, all puzzlingly named Plato. No one has expressed the underlying difficulty more succinctly than Nietzsche: *proste Platon, opisthen te Platon messe te Chimaira*.¹ Surprisingly enough, of our four authors, only Benardete takes seriously the strangeness of the Platonic texts, and here, as we shall see, it is a case of *lucus a non lucendo*.

Vlastos begins promisingly by telling us that his book is for readers "of Plato's earlier dialogues who have felt [the] strangeness" of Socrates (1). Vlastos apparently does not feel that strangeness in Plato's later dialogues, not merely because his topic is the "historical" Socrates, who, he contends, appears only in the early dialogues, but because, as we shall see, Vlastos clearly does not find Plato strange. In any event, the reader is soon disappointed, as Vlastos' method for mitigating or explaining Socrates' strangeness is regulated by his own moral antipathy toward its most pervasive manifestation, irony, which he himself identifies and promptly misinterprets.

The upshot is that the only strange feature of Vlastos' Socrates is his *naïveté* and the conventional content of his beliefs.

Here are two examples. (i) According to Vlastos, Socrates was a man of his time with respect to the acceptance of the supernatural; he believed in the gods and that they communicate with us via dreams and oracles. "Born into this system of religious beliefs, Socrates, a deeply religious man, could not have shrugged it off" (158). (ii) Although Socrates is presented in Plato's early dialogues as "complicated, devious, cunning, and not averse to playing pranks on his interlocutors upon occasion," he remains "always free of resort to deceit...when arguing seriously" (emphasis in text). And how do we know when Socrates is serious? Not to worry: Socrates tells us (Vlastos quotes *Gorgias* 500b-c). "This is the touchstone of Socratic seriousness. When engaged in elenctic argument, searching for the right way to live, he is in dead earnest" (133-34).

As to Plato, upon whom we must rely for Socrates' avowals of seriousness, there is even less cause for concern. We know Plato to be "a sober, responsible thinker, not given to empty boasting" (128), by which Vlastos means that he does not lie about what he knows (I presume that Vlastos has temporarily forgotten about noble or medicinal lies in this context, or perhaps he assumes that the use of elenctic is a moral purifier). To cite Vlastos' "grand methodological hypothesis," we are to believe "that in any given dialogue Plato allows the persona of Socrates only what he (Plato), at the time, considers true" (117). I realize that there are no ironists or for that matter empty boasters in the distinguished circles in which Vlastos moved, and which are frequently identified in the acknowledgements and notes of his book. But virtue is not transitive, and it is perhaps unwise to assume that the honesty of scholars is an icon of the honesty of philosophers. In this connection I cannot resist citing Vlastos' note on "charity" as a principle of interpretation. Since belief is, as Vlastos says, dispositional, "to claim that someone believes *p* is to claim much more than that he asserts it at just this moment; it is to claim that this is what he *would continue to assert* unless something happens to change his mind." This being so, if someone says *p* and non-*p*, we are entitled to look for an interpretation that removes

the inconsistency (236). Unfortunately the principle does not tell us whether the speaker believes non-*p* or *p*, and it certainly does not tell us that the assertion of an inconsistency is not intentional, i.e., an ironical deception.

With Gadamer we are at a more sophisticated level of analysis; he is well aware of "the protreptic provisionalness in which Plato's ethical dialectic is suspended" (6) and so of "the suspended, ironical quality that characterizes Plato's writings, not only where everyone perceives the irony, but continually" (14). Nevertheless, it is his explicit intention to disregard the provisional and ironical nature of Plato's own words in order "to clarify the immanent meaning-content of the [*Philebus*]" and also to provide us with "an excursus on the theory of dialectic which the *Philebus* presents" (*ibid.*). In sum, Gadamer's restatements are intended not simply as phenomenological descriptions but rather as a rendering articulate of the "unspoken" in Plato by casting the articulated surface of the dialogues into the terms of the existential ontology of Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit*. For Gadamer, irony refers to the suspension of affirmation, not to its concealment. His interpretation does not then reveal Plato's hidden teaching but is intended to make evident what Plato himself did not choose to say. As Gadamer also puts the point, "if one wants to interpret Plato's philosophy philosophically, one must necessarily interpret it via Aristotle" (8). But Aristotle is himself interpreted via Heidegger. Plato is accordingly for Gadamer not strange so much as requiring assistance in speaking clearly, i.e., philosophically.

With Benardete's book, we are in a different world or *topos*. He correctly observes that perfect or philosophical writing in accord with Socrates' account in the *Phaedrus* of perfect rhetoric is impossible; perfect writing assumes perfect knowledge of the beings (185–87). He is also right to say that the ascent to the domain of the hyperuranian beings interferes with "a return to the earthly and self-perpetuation through asexual generation" (190), i.e., through the training of students but also by sowing memoranda in the garden of letters. The question then arises: what of Plato's own writings? Were they written, as Socrates would have us believe, to assist Plato's failing memory? For surely they cannot effectuate our

own erotic ascent to the roof of the cosmos unless we have already been there. And if we have, then we do not require the Platonic dialogues, which are addressed to Phaedrus, and thus to persons who are incapable of ascent. Benardete's reply to the question why Plato wrote dialogues is in my opinion to be found in the following passage. "Socrates finally shows us how the knowledge of what is can be used to move gradually through a series of likenesses from what is to what is not and back again so that what began in opposition ends up in an amalgam that suits Phaedrus. Phaedrus can be restored to his beloved Lysias with an image that retains the truth in a fabulous form" (191). I interject here Benardete's thesis that the *Phaedrus* is the passkey to all other dialogues (1). It seems on Benardetean grounds that the *Phaedrus* is intended to unlock the enigma of the dialogues by the provision of fantasies of "the knowledge of what is" to persons of low intelligence and vulgar taste. Presumably Socrates acquired the knowledge of what is during his own hyperuranian ascent. As Socrates neither wrote nor, at least so far as we can tell from the portraits by his students, asserted this truth in oral discourse, he either had no knowledge of what is, in which case Benardete's own explanation of Socratic behavior is unintelligible; or else he regarded all human beings as fantasies of Phaedrus.

I must quote a little farther from the passage just cited. "We ourselves cannot but think of the Platonic Academy and wonder how Socrates, in looking ahead to Plotinus and beyond, and comparing that succession with the silent and dead image of himself in the Platonic dialogues, would judge the fruits of the first against the beauty of the other. The *Phaedrus* makes it easy, perhaps all too easy, for us to decide" (*ibid.*). This last sentence is as close as Benardete comes to levity; we are left on his analysis with a Hobson's choice between edifying speeches written for unphilosophical valetudinarians and the beauty of a silent and dead fantasy that could acquire iconic accuracy only for Plato. In short, we—as opposed to Plato—are left with nothing. And this, appropriately enough, is the outcome of Benardete's commentaries on the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, in which intermittent shafts of brilliant illumination are immediately extinguished by the pervasively crepuscular nature of his prose and the

disconnected concatenation of sentences that serves him instead of connected argument. In his own words: "to be just is to make another perplexed" (97).

II

Palin eks arches. The enigma of Plato, whom Nietzsche also calls "a great Cagliostro,"² remains. I want now to consider the main themes of the three volumes, as space permits. Vlastos begins with a discussion of Socratic irony (Chapter 1), which is later supplemented with further evidence of his thesis that Socrates is not a deceiver or cheater (Chapter 5). Irony can mean either intentional deceit or playful mockery (29); Socrates (in his non-elenctic or unserious moments) practices non-deceitful irony, a new and arresting form of behavior "as free from shamming as are honest games" (*ibid.*). Playful irony is complex: "In 'complex' irony what is said both is and isn't what is meant" (31). As a paradigm of Vlastos' treatment of the textual evidence, I cite his interpretation of *Symposium* 215a7-b3, where Alcibiades compares Socrates to a Silenus-figure. Vlastos says: "This is the picture of a man who lives behind a mask – a mysterious, enigmatic figure, a man nobody knows...All we can get from the simile is concealment, not deceit" (37). Vlastos does not cite 222b1-8, where Alcibiades uses the word "deceit" twice to describe Socrates' behavior toward beautiful youths. In his concern to identify Socrates as a man of demotic virtue, Vlastos does not notice that he has just described the very philosophical irony that is illustrated by the earlier citations from Nietzsche.

It is therefore not surprising that Vlastos never notices the equivalence between wearing a mask and writing dialogues. Let us consider his main thesis in this light. There are, Vlastos maintains, two different Socrates portrayed in the dialogues, whom he represents as S_E and S_M (Vlastos is very fond of the appurtenances of analytic philosophy, which serve a rhetorical rather than a substantive function in his essays). The subscripts designate "early" and "middle" respectively, and refer to the ostensible chronological order of the Platonic dialogues. Vlastos mentions the *Philebus* twice, and classifies it as a late dialogue, but has nothing to say about an S_L .

On the other hand, he has no trouble in identifying Book One of the *Republic* as early. Apart from their chronology, the dialogues are of use to Vlastos as collections of "arguments" and "theses," which he extracts from the texts by disregarding entirely their integrity, and even the interrogative and *ad hominem* form of Socratic conversation. On Vlastosian principles, if the hero of a Shakespearian drama says, "A horse! A horse! My kingdom for a horse!," we are obligated to assume that at this stage of his career Shakespeare's political philosophy puts a higher value on horses than on kingship. As to the difference between poetry and philosophy, I see no evidence that Vlastos has ever considered it with respect to the Platonic dialogues. By what right does Vlastos disregard completely the poetic nature of the dialogue? The reader of his volume soon comes to the realization that Vlastos identifies "philosophy" on the basis of the conventional academic standards of his milieu. Even if it could be shown that these standards are sound, proof would be required of their utility for understanding Plato. There is today a growing recognition, even among Vlastos' preferred colleagues, of the philosophical function of the dramatic form in Plato; there is no sign of this recognition in Vlastos' book.

Nevertheless, Vlastos is undeniably correct in holding that there are different Socrates in the dialogues; I would myself say that the number is greater than two. He is also right to claim that there is evidence in Xenophon and Aristotle of the fact that Socrates was interested exclusively, or centrally, in ethical rather than ontological questions. But what are we to make of this evidence? On Vlastos' own testimony, Xenophon is an unreliable witness to the doctrines of Socrates (40, note 73; his general assessment of Xenophon is low, even patronizing; see especially 99). As to Aristotle, there is widespread agreement that he had his own agenda in discussing the doctrines of his predecessors. I note here only that in summarizing the political views in the *Republic*, Aristotle in his own *Politics* is entirely silent about the philosopher-kings and their education (B 2, 1261a4 ff.). He also attributes doctrines of two principles and eidetic numbers to Plato which are not to be found in the dialogues. To say the least, caution is required in assessing Aristotle's testimony,

especially since, as Vlastos notes, neither Aristotle nor Plato ever refers to the existence of two different Socrates in the dialogues (97).

According to Vlastos, no reference to the distinction was necessary, as it was well-known to all members of the Platonic circle (97 f.). This is an argument from silence which Vlastos would have been quick to reject in other contexts. As I have already suggested, Vlastos' method of eliciting the views of the "early" Socrates rests upon a crude disregard of the specific portraits of the ostensibly early dialogues themselves. But even if we assume that there are two Socrates in the Platonic dialogues, whose views approximate to Vlastos' lists of theses, what does this tell us about Plato's own attitude toward his opposing portraits? Plato never states that he has changed his mind, nor, as Vlastos must admit, does anyone else in the Platonic circle. This is surely unparalleled in the history of philosophy; Vlastos' own hypothetical example of Wittgenstein (98) is contradicted by the historical facts, since the latter's change of philosophies caused endless published debate among his students and disciples.

Wittgenstein himself was not exactly silent about his shift from an early to a later teaching. Why did Plato keep silent? Does not the adoption of the dialogue-form signify a comprehensive silence about one's own views? The absence of unanimity among Plato's own students and immediate successors in the Academy on key points like the doctrine of Ideas suggests that they too were forced to rely upon their interpretations of the dialogues. Conversely, reports of an oral teaching, such as that touching upon mathematics, the Ideas, and the Good, tend to discredit the dialogues as a reliable and unambiguous source of Plato's philosophy, hence too of his attitude toward Socrates. The entire situation, whether we call it deceit or "serious play" (Gadamer 14), is far too complicated to be resolved by drawing up lists of theses extracted from their dramatic presentation.

Beyond this, Vlastos' account forces us to assume that Plato wrote his dialogues for the members of his immediate circle. If we rule out deception and reduce irony to innocent playfulness, Plato's personal students would have had no use for the dialogues,

since they had direct access to his teaching; their disagreement on key points must then be chalked up to incompetence, whether theirs or Plato's. And we are still left with the question as to the intended audience of the dialogues. Does not Vlastos' own detective work speak eloquently of Platonic deceptiveness? The master enigmatiser has bequeathed to posterity a masked portrait of his masked teacher. On the best construction, then, Vlastos has demonstrated the existence of two Platos, and thus the validity of the tradition of Platonic esotericism. Furthermore, his account of the historical Socrates as a conventionally pious man, who, despite his reference to forms (Platonic Ideas) corresponding to the virtues, adheres to the ontology "of the average Athenian" (58), is uninteresting in its own right and forces us to reconsider the implications of the "mysterious, enigmatic figure" whose strangeness motivated Vlastos' study.

I must leave it at this, and turn now to Gadamer. His book will be of primary interest to those with considerable knowledge of the early Heidegger (a thinker not given to innocent playfulness). The study was published in Germany in 1931; it is presented to us in a translation that is wooden at best and leaden for the most part. The translator cannot be entirely at fault, since the original German is weighted down with the language of the existential ontology of *Dasein* (Heidegger's technical term for human existence). This aside, Gadamer's primary intention is to determine whether and in what way Plato's dialectic is ethics (xxv). "Ethics" should be understood here as designating the *ethos* of the philosophical life, not the demotic virtues. It is to the existential idea of the life of the philosopher that the dialogues altogether lead the reader (2). In particular, the ontology of the *Philebus* is identical with the doctrine of Platonic forms. Nevertheless, the goal of the dialogue "is to argue from the general ontological idea of the good precisely to the good of actual human existence" (*ibid.*). Part One of Gadamer's book is devoted to a general analysis of Platonic dialectic. A pervasive feature of his analysis is reminiscent of Heidegger's own interpretations of his most admired predecessors: Plato is alternately assimilated into Heidegger and tacitly criticized on Heideggerian grounds. The first branch of the

alternative is illustrated by Gadamer's attempt to derive dialectic from the practice of everyday life; more specifically, dialectic emerges from the everyday procedures by which we attempt to remove all disconcerting unfamiliarity from the orbit of our lives (22). Science or *theoria* is then "a specific way in which the care of being-in-the-world is put into effect" (26). The Heideggerian critique of Plato is evident in Gadamer's pervasive attribution to the latter of an "ontology" or doctrine of Being as "something present-at-hand in the present" (34). Gadamer regularly emphasizes what is today called the intersubjective nature of dialectic, or what he calls a self-abandonment to the other (39). Dialectic is for him an activity rather than a method, the activity of coming to a shared substantive understanding (52 ff.).

One must note here a weak explanation of why Socrates uses sophistical devices to refute his opponents (something that Vlastos denies altogether). "Socrates' logical traps are merely attempts to shorten the path of refutation, which could also be carried out in a rigorous manner" (57). In general, however, Gadamer is loyal to Socrates' insistence upon the need for agreement between himself and his interlocutor. But to say that language exhibits the identical universality of a thing and that language is based upon the intersubjective structure of practical experience (72 f.) is dangerously close to saying that identical universality is a product of intersubjectivity. Since Plato does not distinguish between practice and production, Gadamer's interpretation amounts to the Heideggerian thesis that, for Plato, Being is production. Furthermore, it is excessively Husserlian to say that "the hypothesis of the *eidos* is a *logos* that cannot be brought to a fall, insofar as it understands the thing... on the basis of what it itself is intended as, at that very moment" (83). The Platonic *eidos* is transformed into a Husserlian *noema* or intentional entity within consciousness. But the *eidos* is not within consciousness, nor is there a Platonic doctrine of intersubjectivity. The apprehension of the *eidos* is an essentially private act; the soul transcends itself, not by intending (in the Husserlian sense), but by being overcome from outside and above. Contrary to Gadamer's presentation, there is a fundamental difference between the dialectic

of agreement and erotic solipsism, which latter is distinct both from the surrogate eros for human beings as well as from the subjective solipsism of Husserlian intentionality.

The second half of Gadamer's book studies the *Philebus* as the attempt by *Dasein* to elicit the good for life from its own desires and choices (105). Throughout his interpretation, Gadamer restates many of Socrates' themes in terms derived from Aristotle's practical philosophy (e.g. 24 ff. on *technē*). This is very close to Heidegger's own assimilation of Aristotle in *Sein und Zeit*. Gadamer, too, prefers Aristotle to Plato on philosophical grounds (xxxiv). He holds that Aristotle, when speaking of the good, brings out the difference between ontology and ethics, Aristotle thus "parts company precisely from the fundamental Platonic position, which undertakes to define man's being privatively, on the basis of a universal definition of the meaning of being, rather than positively, on the basis of man's ownmost understanding of *Dasein*" (140). It seems to me that this statement is either mistaken or seriously misleading. There is no universal definition of the meaning of being in Plato. Besides, on Gadamer's own account, *Dasein* searches for the good life on the basis of its everyday awareness of its own desires and choices. I have no space for the consideration of further details; let me close with the remark that Gadamer never explains why Socrates introduces the elaborate "ontological" discussion of the four kinds, which is not used in the subsequent analysis of the elements of the good life (212).

Benardete's enigmatic exhibition of philosophical rhetoric is by far the most intriguing of the three books under review. He goes straight to work on the Platonic texts; his interpretation is its own methodological introduction. But Benardete's fondness for the gnomic (perhaps even the oneiric) and the paradoxical (his text is peppered with sentences like these: "What is right in front of us is not right in front of us. What is not right in front of us is what is right in front of us in the being of what appears" [146]) is more obfuscatory than illuminating. Still, one recognizes that Benardete is moving on Platonic terrain, even if the direction in which he is heading is rarely clear. There are 31 figures interspersed like Kafkaesque

road-maps throughout the text, but which were to me of limited assistance. I have already attempted to convey what I take to be the most pervasive conclusion of Benardete's interpretation of Plato: philosophy is, if possible at all, equivalent to silence. The dialogues are thus poetic memoranda written in terms that will be salutary for persons like Phaedrus. The same inference maybe drawn from the *Gorgias* interpretation, where, speaking of 508e6–509a7, Benardete says: "Between the spurious corporeality of hedonism and the equally spurious morality of soul, philosophy shines through. Its orderliness is grounded in the ordered disorderliness of knowledge of ignorance. Not everything can be in place if philosophy is to be off base. Philosophy always says the same; Socrates does not" (90).

I will give two more examples of Benardete's exegetical style, in which illumination is muffled by arbitrariness and/or excessive concision. (i) Gorgias describes the power of his rhetorical art, which allowed him to persuade patients who would not obey their physicians (one of them his own brother) to undergo surgery or take medicine. Gorgias adds that a skilled rhetorician could persuade the city to elect him to the office of physician (456a6 ff.). Benardete says that "if Gorgias contradicted his brother to his face, he was believed not because the patient took him as more of an expert, but because he told him what he wanted to believe. Gorgias, then, does not distinguish between a fraudulent appeal to the passions and a fraudulent claim to expertise. He thereby reveals that he does not know what causes him to be effective. He believes that because the assembly would elect him as a doctor, they would be electing him because he was a doctor and not on account of his extravagant promises" (23 f.). No assertion in this passage is justified by the text as Benardete himself summarizes it. Gorgias does not say that he contradicts his brother; if anything, he reinforces the physicians claims that medicine or cautery is necessary. Next, Gorgias does not claim to be a physician but rather to be able to persuade. Since he succeeds in this, his claim to expertise is not fraudulent. Finally, Gorgias clearly knows what makes him effective: rhetoric. His statement makes it clear that rhetoric has more power than medicine (see 456a7–8), not as medicine or by the rhetorician's pretending to be a doctor, but in

allowing medicine to accomplish its ends by supplementing it with a power of persuasion that medicine lacks. Gorgias has the power to persuade the patient to take medicine, not to imagine that he will be cured by listening to speeches. There is no reason whatsoever to infer that Gorgias would attribute his election to the fact that he is a physician.

(ii) On page 64 of his book, immediately after a quite illuminating remark on the significance of the names "Callicles" and "demos," Benardete takes up Socrates' assertion that he and Callicles each have two loves. Benardete comments on the double use of the dual: *erōnte duo onte duoin hekateros* (481d3). "The twoness of their loves seems to reflect back on their own twoness, as if Socrates were split in two through his double love of Alcibiades and philosophy, no less than Callicles was through the duplicate demos" (64). According to Benardete, Socrates "makes Callicles and himself into a pair of lovers of two loves" (*ibid.*). This is an intriguing claim; in order to bring out its consequences, and thus to determine its validity, Benardete owes us an extensive analysis of how Socrates regards Alcibiades. If the Alcibiades of the *Symposium* is correct, Socrates does not love him or anyone else. In this case, it is only as a fantasm that Socrates is split in two; and this is essentially what is conveyed in Benardete's claim, apropos the *Phaedrus*, that in the myth of the charioteer, Socrates is the black horse who invents the white horse, which Benardete identifies with Phaedrus (150, 179 f.). It follows that Socrates neither loves nor is erotically attracted to Phaedrus but replaces him with a fantasm. "The white horse, however, is Phaedrus, whose speech it is, or it is Phaedrus' noble version of himself presented to him through Socrates. Socrates, then, is the black horse, who can be both himself and another. Phaedrus is on this occasion that other. Socrates is never any other. He does not have in himself any beautiful other, but he never appears as himself but only as the other of some beautiful other" (150).

Benardete seems to waver between treating Phaedrus as a lover who is capable of philosophy (129, 144) and as a nonentity (see also 189: "Phaedrus is a warning of how not to read a Platonic dialogue"). Alcibiades, of course, is not unconscious and certainly not inanimate.

Unlike Phaedrus, he knows that he is a Socratic fantasm. But the enigma remains: why does Socrates generate erotic simulacra of unerotic fantasms? Is Derrida correct after all to identify philosophy as onanism? Why does the masked narcissist appear only "as the other of some beautiful other"? Is his presence equivalent to what Heidegger calls the absence of being? Has Benardete shown that, contrary to Gadamer, being is not for Plato "something present at hand in the present" but otherness or non-being? Benardete neither explicitly raises nor unambiguously answers these questions. But he moves us to raise them, and therefore his book in some degree transcends its self-imposed limitations.

Notes

- 1 *Kritische Studienausgabe*, ed. Colli-Montinari (Berlin 1980) *Bd. X*, p.340 [1883].
- 2 *KSA*, *Bd. XIII*, p. 293 [1888].

CHAPTER NINE

Is Metaphysics Possible?

I

During the past two decades, much has been said about the ostensible exhaustion of the age of metaphysics.¹ This thesis is closely related to the claim that history, or Western European history, is over, or else that we have shifted from the historical epoch of modernism to that of postmodernism. We can bring out the underlying relation between these two claims by a brief reflection on Hegel and Heidegger. In the Hegelian teaching, the entrance of God into history in the person of Jesus Christ is taken as the paradigm for the eventually coincident development of absolute and historical time. The *parousia* of God is interpreted as the self-manifestation of the Absolute by stages which correspond to the major stages in the history of philosophy. These in turn are expressed concretely in the domain of art and religion, and, most comprehensively, within the political articulation of world history. The unification of theory and practice is thus equivalent to the complete accessibility of wisdom and human self-satisfaction.

Heidegger's thought is in certain key respects a "reversed Hegelianism," to borrow and revise Nietzsche's claim that his own thought is a "reversed Platonism," a claim that plays an important role in Heidegger's destiny. It would be fair to say that Heidegger conceives of European history as a steadily increasing concealment of the original revelation, within archaic Greece, of Being as "uncoveredness" or "disclosure" (truth as *alētheia*). This history is essentially defined by a series of "gifts" in which Being "sends" itself in a concealed form to the great epoch-defining thinkers. Here is the reversal of Hegelianism: for Hegel, the historical manifestation of a given stage in the development of the Absolute, primarily within the teaching of a world-historical philosopher, leads by a self-correcting process to the complete uncovering and discovery of truth.

For Heidegger there is a continual "wandering" or "errance" of thinking which is misled, as it were, by the duplicitous "events" of Being. The net result of this can only be described as a falling away from the luminous, if not fully articulate, revelation by the archaic Greeks of the original source.

Whereas Hegel announces the *parousia* of the Absolute within the historical present of his own time and thought, Heidegger sees himself as chosen to testify to the errance of Being in its historical residue or concealment. The second coming is in this case not salvation but another prophecy. The age of metaphysics is over, and we must turn to "the other beginning of thought"²—thus the link between the end of metaphysics and, if not the end of history, at least the beginning of postmodernism. In the contemporary discussion, Heidegger's reversed Hegelianism has dominated almost entirely over Hegel's own claim to wisdom, which tends to be seen by postmodern authorities as an egregious example of metaphysics. Since these authorities concur with Heidegger's judgment that the history of metaphysics is the history of Platonism, it follows that Hegel was an egregious Platonist.

What we think of this last inference is important, but it is of secondary interest to the question of why metaphysics is identified as Platonism. Let us note first that the postmodernists, following Heidegger, speak of Platonism rather than of Plato, thereby indicating that they indict Plato's historical influence rather than the actual content of his thought, which is concealed within the enigmatic dialogues. By Platonism is meant a rather Aristotelian understanding of the so-called Platonic doctrine of Ideas. That is to say, Platonism is identified with the effort to apprehend, by intellectual perception, pure eternal forms which are both the originals and the causes of the images in the world of genesis, even though separate from these images and impervious to their transience. In accordance with the Heideggerian critique of Platonism, the Ideas are exposed as "projects" or perspectives of proto-subjectivity, or, in a slightly different vocabulary, as immanent artifactual simulacra of a misunderstanding concerning the nature of Being. To Platonism, Being is eternal and formal, whereas Heidegger has completed the demonstration that

Being is an origination-process, or, in other words, a continuously changing activity through which forms are temporally produced.

Although the terms are not those of Heidegger, I suggest that we may understand his distinction between origination-process and its self-concealed manifestations or reifications as a version of the distinction between transcendental and immanent temporality, which is also to be found in Hegel's distinction between Absolute activity and human history. For my present purposes the most important consequence of these distinctions is that metaphysics, as it understands and has always understood itself, is impossible. With its claim to the accessibility of complete knowledge of the principles of the formation-process, as well as to knowledge of the entire structure of the Absolute as product, Hegelianism is nothing but a hyper-Platonism when seen from a Heideggerian or post-Heideggerian standpoint. From Plato to Hegel we see the history of metaphysics as the misdirected attempt, or the false claim, to acquire eternal knowledge of eternity, including the limit-case in which eternity is perpetual circular motion.

It is one of the subthemes of this paper that Hegel's "Platonism" does not lie in his doctrine of form, and certainly not in his claim to have achieved wisdom or conceptual knowledge of the whole, but rather in the *Aufhebung* of Eros within his doctrine of the activity of self-consciousness. Stated succinctly, thinking for Hegel is *kinēsis*, just as Socrates defines the soul in the *Phaedrus* as "always in excitation" (as I take the liberty of translating *aeikinēton*) and as the "principle of change" (*archē kinēseōs*).³ For Aristotle, on the contrary, the soul is not changing, since it is an entelechy or *eidos*,⁴ and thinking is like coming to a stand rather than like moving.⁵

One could say that Plato is not a Hegelian primarily because he separates the Ideas from the erotic soul; we must recollect the vision obtained in a discarnate stage, and even then while subject to the various motions of the cosmos.⁶ Hegel sets into motion, as it were, not the Platonic Ideas, but the Aristotelian forms as present within the intellect. It is of historical importance to notice that for Aristotle the imagination (*phantasia*) is changing, and that soul does not engage in noetic thinking without *phantasmata*.⁷ This certainly

exposes the soul to change in its perceptual, and hence cognitive, activity. The comparison between Hegel and Heidegger can also profitably be made with respect to the Aristotelian doctrine of *noēsis*, and in the extreme case, of *noēsis tēs noēseōs*, thought thinking itself. As I have just indicated, noetic thinking of form is not for Aristotle a process, whether transcendental or immanent. It does not exhibit a rhythm that is mirrored in the interrelationships exemplified by the thinking of this or that form. It does not produce or constitute the form. Aristotle does say that *nous* (or the *psychē*) is or becomes "somehow" (*pōs*) the beings. That this is a metaphor is made evident, in Aristotle's usual cryptic manner, by the particle *pōs*.⁸ Thinking is for Aristotle an activity only in the sense of enactment. The *energeia* or "actuality" of the form is enacted or presented within *noēsis*, which must be understood as the joint presence of the eternal form, as so to speak having arrived all at once within its particular instance, and to the particular thinker. One could perhaps contend that without thinking there would be no forms. But this does not support the thesis that forms are made, that is, put together, whether transcendently or immanently, by a determinate and determinable cognitive process. It rather supports the thesis that human being participates in the domain of eternal being upon the occasion of thinking the form that is also visible in the particular object of thought.

Aristotle's doctrine of thinking is cryptically expressed and full of *aporiae*. But there is no room in the texts for the view that the presentation of species-forms is their constitution from subeidetic elements by a process that is identical in being and thinking. This, however, is precisely Hegel's contention. The dialectical structure attributed by Hegel to the process governing the development of the Absolute is none other than the dialectical structure intrinsic to thinking itself. Thus for Aristotle, the enactment of knowledge is in accord with the particularity of beings. To know is to know this or that particular form. For Hegel, the activity of knowledge is in accord with the activity of the formation-process. To know is to exemplify the rhythm of that process, and so of forms in their interaction, within the rhythm of thinking.

Heidegger's distinction between Being and beings may be understood as a post-Hegelian revision of an Aristotelian insight. Although there is no direct or explicit analogy in Aristotle to what Heidegger calls Being, we can see in the latter a residue of the Aristotelian formulation of the relation between being and thinking. As we have just noted, for Aristotle the *eidos* or species form, or "being" in the fullest and primary sense of the term, is given to human cognition on the occasion of perception of the particular of such and such a kind, via enactment in the passive or potential intellect. This corresponds very roughly to the Heideggerian doctrine of the "gift" of Being to human thought. Being is accordingly not produced by mankind, but the attempt to master Being through technical or productive thinking plays a crucial role in the determination of beings. Heidegger thus separates the receptive thinking of Being from the productive thinking of beings, while retaining the Hegelian understanding of both as temporal processes. I draw the following conclusion from this general comparison between Aristotle on the one hand and the two German thinkers on the other. Although Heidegger and his successors refer to metaphysics as Platonism, what they actually understand by this term would be better (although of course not perfectly) described as Aristotelianism. Despite what has been called his aporetic or even dialectical presentation, Aristotle directs us toward a first philosophy, traditionally called "metaphysics," on however ambiguous a basis, that is explicitly referred to as the science (*epistēmē*) of being *qua* being.

One can, and indeed must, distinguish between two senses of *epistēmē* or "knowledge" in Aristotle. As I shall indicate, we know the first principles and causes in a way different from the manner in which scientific or demonstrative knowledge is obtained about the distinct species of beings. My point is not, however, that Aristotle advocates demonstrative knowledge in metaphysics; it is rather that Aristotelianism, or the historical development of metaphysics, alias Platonism, turns upon the suppression of the difference between the aforementioned two senses.⁹ Whether in approbation or condemnation, metaphysics comes to be identified with demonstrative knowledge, via predicative discourse, of pure forms.

This situation does not arise without assistance from Aristotle. Being *qua* being is defined by means of a categorial structure which itself rests upon the conception of *ousia* as the independent owner of properties. It thus looks very much as though the science of being *qua* being is predicative discourse, or the assertion of the properties of *ousia* (translated as both substance and essence). Since *ousia*, understood as essence, is the species-form, Aristotelian metaphysics is at bottom the thinking of pure, eternal forms that are discovered or received rather than produced, whether by the origination-process of Being or by human cognition.

As we shall see, there is no demonstrative knowledge of essence for Aristotle; hence the categories are, strictly speaking, irrelevant to the explanation of how we apprehend or know, and hence how we possess an *epistēmē* of being in its primary sense of *eidos*. But the categories are directly relevant to the question of the structure of being *qua* being. In order to keep straight the situation within the *Metaphysics*, we have to distinguish between knowledge of the *eidos* or essence, which arises by noetic intuition, and knowledge of being *qua* being. This latter is knowledge not of the *eidos*, but of the *on* as consisting of form and matter.

The first category contains the answers to the question What is it? which we address to each being: it is an *ousia* in the sense of essence or species-form. The other categories (and Aristotle's lists vary) classify all remaining properties of the being. These properties are not of the *eidos* but of the *on* or being. Whereas each such property is accidental in the sense that it could have been otherwise, Aristotle intends the categories as a schema of properties which are necessary in the general sense that every *on*, understood as a composite of form and matter, must possess one or another property from every category in the schema.

With a crucial exception that I will mention in a moment, being *qua* being thus refers to the structure underlying beings, namely, a structure consisting of an instance of a species-form with properties that are classifiable according to the categories. The exception is discarnate form, god, or the pure thinking of thinking. This leads to the vexed question of whether metaphysics in the sense of First

Philosophy can be the same as theology, or knowledge of god, the highest being.

We do not need to take a stand on this question, because it is not central to our present concern, which is the development of metaphysics understood today (wrongly) as Platonism. As to the doctrine of actuality and potentiality, developed in *Metaphysics* 9, it constitutes in one sense a separate analysis of the problem of being, and in another sense it is subordinate to the understanding of *eidos*. Since it is with *eidos* that I am primarily concerned, I shall put to one side the distinction between actuality and potentiality, on which I have written elsewhere.¹⁰

To summarize by way of transition, there is no single science of being in the Aristotelian corpus, but there is a "science" of being *qua* being that has determined the historical destiny of metaphysics. In the Platonic dialogues, by contrast, there is no single science of being *qua* being, but at most a variety of discussions of Ideas or pure forms that cannot be reduced to a common, well-defined doctrine. Furthermore, there is an elaborate presentation of the human soul in terms of the erotic desire for the Ideas, of which one finds only a pallid vestige in *Metaphysics* 12. Eros is not itself an Idea but what one might almost call, in Hegelian terms, negative excitation. There is in Plato no speculative dialectic to correspond to this psychic excitation, nor is there a *logos* of the origin of the cosmos or Whole (*to holon*), the Platonic analogue to Hegel's *das Ganze*. Neither God, man, nor world, the three principal topics of metaphysics, is in Plato accessible to the predicative or analytical discourse concerning determinate formal structure.

II

I have argued elsewhere that there are striking parallels between the Platonic and the Heideggerian ways of philosophizing, and I do not wish to repeat that discussion.¹¹ For my present purposes, it is pertinent to say instead that both the speculative dialectic of Hegel and the "originative" thinking of Heidegger reflect in their opposition to traditional metaphysics a dependence upon Aristotle that is also visible in their admiration for him. The simplest way to explain

the centrality of Aristotle for both these German thinkers is to say that each is concerned, Hegel in a positive sense, and Heidegger as its sharp critic, with the notion of a science of the ultimate structure of the whole. Put another way, Hegel replaces metaphysics with the "first philosophy" of the *Science of Logic*, whereas Heidegger clearly regards philosophy as nothing other than First Philosophy, albeit not as a science but as an inquiry into Being.

My general suggestion, then, is that the postmodern identification of metaphysics as Platonism, even allowing for the distinction between the enigmatic dialogues of Plato and his historical influence, is not merely a crude oversimplification; it is largely on the wrong track. The "ontological" interpretation of Platonism is wrong in itself because it omits one of the two crucial components of the Platonic tradition: the doctrine of Eros, or more comprehensively, the dependence of *logos* upon *mythos*. As to the "theory of Ideas," it is an invention of nineteenth-century historical scholarship. Despite much quasi-mathematical rhetoric, Plato presents us with a series of discontinuous poems about the Ideas. As to diaeresis, even if we regard it as equivalent to dialectic, the wished-for science of Ideas that Socrates alludes to in the *Republic*, the only actual examples of the method of division and collection in accordance with kinds are those devoted to the definition of the sophist and the statesman—hardly instances of eidetic analysis.¹²

In sum, the most evident implication of the Platonic dialogues as fictional dramas or poems is that there is no science of being *qua* being, and certainly none of Being or the Whole. Aristotle, on the other hand, clearly refers to the science of being *qua* being in conjunction with the categories and predicative assertions. Whether or not the name "metaphysics" derives from the classification of Aristotle's manuscripts by Andronicus of Rhodes, metaphysics as we know it is a product of Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition, not of Platonism.

What can, however, be said is that the turn away from the primacy of form to the primacy of the formation-process, although it seems to have more in common with Christian speculation than with Greek philosophy, is certainly related to the Platonic doctrine of Eros. But since the pejorative sense of metaphysics refers to the

notion of pure forms, this observation serves only to emphasize the inaptness of the designation of metaphysics as Platonism. One might put it this way: the Aristotle of the Aristotelian tradition created metaphysics by ignoring the Platonic reservations with respect to discursive, as opposed to mythical, thinking, and by replacing the mythical or hypothetical¹³ doctrine of Ideas with the scientific doctrine of species-forms.

In order to avoid confusion, I must immediately qualify the assertion that metaphysics is Aristotelianism by noting that this assertion is intended to bring out the inner sense of the postmodern thesis that metaphysics is Platonism. Once we discard fashionable contemporary ideologies and study the history of philosophy in detail, it becomes apparent that there are many different types of metaphysics. Any attempt to answer the question "Is metaphysics possible?" that takes its bearings from the actual uses of the term will soon dissolve into an endless series of particular historical and doctrinal analyses. The multiplicity of the conceptions of metaphysics is itself no doubt due to the fact that what we mean by this term is a consequence of what we mean by philosophy. It is tempting to conclude that nothing serious can be said about metaphysics unless we ourselves engage in it.

III

In what follows, it is not my concern to give a balanced and comprehensive picture of Aristotle's development of his contention that "being is said in many ways."¹⁴ I shall also not analyze in detail the ambiguities of his contention that "being" is a *pros hen legomenon*, that is, a term applied with respect to the sense of *ousia*, but not in such a way (*kath' hen*) as to define a single science. The key point is that the investigation of what is *kath' hen legomenon* belongs to one science of a single species of beings; this science assumes the species as given and attempts to acquire demonstrative knowledge of beings of this species.

The *pros hen* distinction, as we saw previously, is intended to convey the fact that the items in the remaining categories are called "being" with respect to the first category. I believe that this

is a crucial source of confusion for the subsequent development of metaphysics. The fact is that, by Aristotle's own doctrines, the items in the remaining categories are properties of the composite being (*on*) or substance. To say that they are called "being" with respect to *ousia* or essence confuses two distinct points. (1) The properties classified in the other categories are called "being" with respect to the substance whose properties they are, not with respect to the essence or *eidos* of that substance. (2) The substance is called "being" primarily with respect to its essence.

To these two points we may add a third: As the primary sense of being, *eidos* or essence is also the foundation of the structure of being *qua* being; but it is not itself being *qua* being. Putting to one side the problem of god or the highest being, mentioned above, as an added complication that does nothing to simplify matters, we see that there is a dualism intrinsic to Aristotle's treatment of being. He draws no distinction akin to Heidegger's distinction between Being and beings, but he does distinguish between form and being *qua* being, although they are closely related, as I have just noted. The turn to a Heideggerian "Being" arises, I suspect, from the fact that *eidos* or essence is a configuration of essential properties, the necessary unity of which cannot be established by discursive reason.

This point needs development. There seem to be only two possible ways in which we can know the *eidos*. Either we arrive at this knowledge by apprehending its properties, which we are then able to state in a series of predicative assertions as belonging to, and indeed as constituting, the essence; or else we intuit or perceive intellectually the *eidos* in its unity and identity. The first alternative is of course excluded for Aristotle, since to know an *eidos* is to possess its definition, and there is no predication in a definition.¹⁵ There is a deeper difficulty in this alternative, however. If it is asserted, we must distinguish between essential and accidental properties of the substance; obviously no essence can have accidental properties. But in order to specify the essential properties, we must know the essence.

In other words, we cannot know one before the other; hence we must know them simultaneously. What Aristotle says of the specific difference must hold of all essential properties: there is no

predication here. There is no "before and after" with respect to the essential properties;¹⁶ they are a fully given, internally articulated, unity. We cannot predicate them of anything because there is nothing in the essence *other than* the essential properties of which to predicate them. They belong, so to speak, to themselves. Accordingly, the essence must be known by intellectual perception or *noēsis*, exactly as Aristotle says in the *Posterior Analytics*.¹⁷

The *eidos* or essence is intuited all at once; no demonstration is involved in grasping it. There is also no demonstration in the science of being *qua* being, which consists primarily in the presentation of the schema of the categories and the justification of the *pros hen* status of descriptions of being *qua* being. The categories, as the German philosophers from Kant onward objected, are not "deduced." Moreover, within the categories, the distinction between *ousia* in the sense of composite separate substance, and the properties of this substance, depends upon a combination of intellectual intuition and sense perception. If there is any demonstrated knowledge in metaphysics, it must be subsequent to and dependent upon predemonstrative knowledge.

Let me recapitulate. In order to know being *qua* being we must verify the distinction between essences and accidents, or, what comes to the same thing, between substances and essences. This verification rests upon intellectual intuition; that is, it is prediscursive or meta-scientific. As has often been noted, the Aristotelian science of being *qua* being rests upon the givenness, within pretheoretical experience, of separate and composite particulars such as man, dog, horse, but also tree, stone, star, and so on. To this we can add the following important point. Intellectual intuition is not an occult or theoretical power reserved for metaphysicians; it is the power of human thinking *par excellence*, by which we apprehend a given pattern of properties as constituting a separate particular of such and such a kind.

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says that *epistēmē* is *hypolēpsis*, that is, "taking up" into the intellect and thereby forming a conception "of the universals and of necessary beings, which are the principles of demonstration and of every science (for science is *via logos*); but there is neither science nor *technē* nor *phronēsis* of the principles

of that which is known."¹⁸ As I have already noted, metaphysics or First Philosophy is *sophia* or *epistēmē*¹⁹ in the sense of the theoretical study of "the first principles and causes." But this formulation has to be rendered more precise by distinguishing between the apprehension of the principles and highest causes of the first science, which can only occur through *nous*, or intellectual perception,²⁰ and the *apodeikseis*, or demonstrations, that follow from these perceptions.

In this context, one should note briefly an aporia concerning the universal. The *Posterior Analytics* states that the *kath' hauto*, that is, the *ousia* or *eidos*, is universal.²¹ This doctrine seems to be denied in a number of passages in the *Metaphysics*.²² I find the texts to be mutually inconsistent, and those in the *Metaphysics* to be obscure beyond the possibility of secure interpretation. Regardless, however, of whether or not *ousia* is universal, it cannot be known by demonstration. Hence metaphysics, understood as First Philosophy, is not demonstrative knowledge.

On the other hand, many have refused to believe that metaphysics is nothing more than a dialectical presentation of the conflicting opinions about being. Their position would gain in strength if they could show what demonstrations, based upon the noetic perception of essences, make up the *epistēmē* of First Philosophy. Whether or not they can produce such demonstrations from Aristotle's texts, their argument itself supports my main contention: Aristotle, willingly or otherwise, is the source of the confusion that leads to the notion of metaphysics as rational knowledge of eternal form.

Metaphysics (as distinct from First Philosophy) arises from the attempt to furnish a body of demonstrated truths about essences. This attempt is associated historically with the categorial structure that Aristotle introduces in conjunction with his very cryptic account of the science of being *qua* being in *Metaphysics* 4. One could say that the categories, understood as the properties of being (separate substances), are replaced with categories of the essential properties, not of this or that essence (since these would differ from case to case), but of essence as such. This step is encouraged by the so-called *pros hen* relation which gives the impression that the properties in the remaining categories are called "being" with respect to the first category

of *ousia*. In other words, being *qua* being is now understood, tacitly or explicitly, as essence, the primary sense of being. As is entirely clear in Kant, what is essential to a being is furnished it by the transcendental ego via the categories. Accordingly, the distinction drawn by Aristotle between essence and being *qua* being collapses.

For Aristotle, the most important (but not the only) part of what it means to be is to have an essence. Essences are particular identities; they share a universal in the genus, but each is distinguished from the other by its differences, the most important of which is the ultimate difference. What we have understood by the essence is expressed in a definition. The definition (*horismos*) states the genus and the ultimate difference; but these are derived from observation and so from perception, both sensuous and intellectual. To repeat an earlier observation, there is no predication in a definition,²³ no before and after with respect to the essential properties,²⁴ because these are given simultaneously to intuition, that is, they actualize all at once, not in an order. Hence none belong to some other property; there is no owner of essential properties in the essence. At this point, a new interpretation becomes possible. The givenness or visibility or presence of the essential properties may be conceived as concealing an underlying and invisible owner, what one could call the substratum of the essence itself, or Being, namely, that which has no properties because it is not a particular, but is rather a universal, or being *qua* being in a new sense: that which is common to all beings.

The *eidos*, however, is an *atomon eidos*; it is presented at once and as a unity. It cannot be assembled from below by a combination of predicative statements, and it cannot be arrived at by analysis from above, that is, by the division of the genus, even assuming that we know all the differences of each genus. As I have also noted above, we are left in the dark concerning the identity of virtually all differences other than such reliable examples as "rational" and "featherless."

I believe we arrive at the following conclusion: there cannot be a demonstration of the *eidos*, and hence there is no scientific knowledge of it, whether or not we call it "universal." It is impossible to verify the content of an intellectual intuition, since this is the foundation or precondition for all scientific verification. There is accordingly

no science, no discursive knowledge consisting of predicative statements, statements that say "something about something," that is, about the primary sense of being, namely, *eidōs*. Metaphysics, in order to be understood as the discursive analysis of being *qua* being, then becomes dependent upon a metadiscursive assertion of essence, and this in turn leads in two directions, both fatal for our science.

Either (1) metaphysics devolves gradually into a descriptive phenomenology, in which we exchange assertions about how essences look to us, or else (2) it is replaced by a linguistic conventionalism, with rules or definitions that *stipulate* what shall count as an essence in each case. One could also put it this way: metaphysics devolves into either the arbitrariness of looking or the endless discussion of the rules of discussion—into voyeurism or chatter.

This is in fact precisely what has transpired in the history of philosophy. From the present standpoint, we may regard this history as the steady repudiation of the given, that is, of everyday experience as a more reliable source of the units to be analyzed than any theoretical construction purporting to give those units, or their structure, not as they appear and show themselves, but as they are, in accord with a paradigm or model that abstracts from the phenomena in order to reconcile their ostensible inconsistencies. The repudiation of Aristotle by Aristotelianism thus leads inevitably to history, understood as the endless record of the production and rejection of models of ontological structure.

There can be no doubt that Aristotle intended metaphysics to be the science of being *qua* being in a sense having nothing to do with historical process, whether in the transcendental or human senses of that expression. At the same time, it is impossible to doubt that the weaknesses intrinsic to his textual presentation of metaphysics, and so to Aristotelianism (in the sense above defined, as analogous to the Heideggerian use of "Platonism"), gave rise to the gradual triumph of phenomenological and linguistic historicism.

IV

My argument to this point has intended to suggest that Aristotelianism, or the metaphysics of being *qua* being as form, leads directly,

because of *aporiae* internal to its original presentation by Aristotle, to a metaphysics of activity. This is not, of course, activity in the Aristotelian sense of *energeia*, but in a sense much closer to the Platonic notion of Eros as self-differentiating psychic formation, in a way not dissimilar to what Hegel calls negative excitation. Eros, however, is transformed from pure negative desire for separate forms into a "transcendental" process of formation. Eros does not merely differentiate the psyche into a variety of human types, each defined by what it loves. Erotic desire is now conceived as a double process: that of desire and of the satisfaction of desire by the production of the forms it seeks.

If we take classical metaphysics to be defined as Aristotelianism, together with its extension into the modern period in the guise of Cartesianism, and of neo-Kantian positivism and phenomenology, and if, on the other hand, we say "process" metaphysics is exemplified by German Idealism and Hegel, and by post-Idealist thinkers like Nietzsche and Heidegger, to say nothing of the postmoderns, then the following historical observation is valid. The turn from the classical to the process metaphysics is, in an essential sense, a return from Aristotelianism to Platonism. Ironically enough, this partial return to Plato has been identified, especially from the time of Nietzsche forward, as anti-Platonism.

It is, of course, not my intention to maintain that Plato's various discussions of the Ideas, however sketchy or poetic, amount to a genuine anticipation of Idealism or of Nietzschean and Heideggerian doctrines of formation-process. I have, however, suggested that Plato's reticence in discussing the Ideas, as well as his various indications, perhaps especially at *Phaedrus* 248a1, of the perspectival vision of the Ideas by even the most philosophical of human beings, together with his separation of the forms from the intellect, which is set into motion by erotic desire rather than instantaneously actualized by noetic enactment of the form, all incline in a restricted but significant degree toward the eventual development of the metaphysics of *Trieb* and *Selbstbewusstsein*. They lead, or at least point, too, to a speculative dialectical logic in which the eidetic elements are "woven" together into formal structure by the very attempt to think these elements separately.

It could of course be argued that the shift from the "separation" thesis of Platonism to the Aristotelian doctrine of the enactment of the forms within the potential intellect is the first critical step in rendering them accessible to the "shaping" or constructive powers of the discursive and (eventually) the imaginative intelligence. I myself agree that this shift was influential in the ultimate development of modern philosophy. In itself, however, it could not account for the developments I have sketched above, because no role is given to psychological processes of reflection, imagination, and construction. Strictly speaking, Aristotle's doctrine of thinking casts no light on how individual human beings ("substances" in the earlier terminology) are able to cognize the forms that (in some sense or another) are "universally" enacted, not by particular intellectual faculties, but by the propertyless or formless *nous*.

Returning once more to the question of the possibility of metaphysics, I want to suggest that, very far from having been overcome in its identity as Platonism, metaphysics is today more prominent than ever, and if not precisely as Platonism, certainly in a sense closer to Plato than to Aristotle. Metaphysics is possible precisely because *it is not actual*. I mean by this that the repudiation of the science of being *qua* being, in the sense of a discursive or deductive knowledge of pure form, has reopened the way for a more diverse understanding of what it is to know, and hence of what it is to be a form, that is, the structure of what appears.

In the remaining section of this paper, I put historical speculations to one side and I attempt to make my point in purely analytic or theoretical terms. Stated with introductory brevity, this point is that metaphysics is rooted in a silence that corresponds directly to the discontinuity between our noetic reach and our dianoetic or discursive grasp. I limit myself in this paper to illustrating this discontinuity by some remarks about unity and identity.

We saw from our consideration of Aristotle that there are very strong reasons to distinguish between the intuitive or prediscursive foundations and the discursive development of metaphysics, understood as an *epistēmē* of being *qua* being. Despite Aristotle's contention that the sense of being *qua* being is given by the schema of the

categories, it is rather the case that the primary sense of being *qua* being is *ousia* in the sense of *to ti ēn einai* or *eidos*. Putting Aristotle to one side at this point in our reflections, let us consider the nature of the difficulty presented by a metaphysics of pure form. Each form is both a unity and an identity. It is an identity in the sense that we can distinguish it from all other forms, and this requires that it possess an internally articulated structure of subeidetic elements. It is also a unity, however, in the sense that all subeidetic elements cohere in the given identity as "this identity here, and none other." The point may seem obscure, but it can be made indirectly as follows. The identity of each form is different from all the others; but the unity of every form, *qua* unity, is the same. The unity underlies the identity; it is visible in the coherence of features as this one identity. Put another way, each identity is both one and many; it is many as a plurality of subeidetic elements, but one as a single identity.

If we ask the question "What is it?" concerning something, the correct answer is to give its identity. But that which allows the identity to present itself as this identity rather than as a transient multiplicity of formal traits is its unity. This is the unity that Kant attempts to impose onto "psychological" associations via the synthetic activity of the transcendental ego. His description of the transcendental ego, however, as well as of its functions, is the stipulation of identities.

The transcendental ego is constituted as the transcendental unity of apperception, which has a determinate identity that is given by the specification of the powers of reason and the understanding, hence as the regulative Ideas, the table of categories, and so on. This identity might be otherwise, given some other account of the conditions for the possibility of discursive thinking in beings like ourselves. But the properties or faculties constituting the alternative identity would be unified within some equivalent to the transcendental unity of apperception.

One cannot arrive at an ultimate unity by a series of syntheses, but only at an identity; and this identity could have been otherwise. The unity that is "projected" by the transcendental ego, however that set of conditions is identified, is not a sum of functions—not,

in other words, a multiplicity—but the condition for the unity of each and every identity. The identity of the transcendental ego is already marked by unity, which can hardly be explained as spontaneous self-unification. Whereas every analysis presupposes a synthesis, only unities can synthesize. A synthesis is a synthesis of units of identity; and the condition of synthesis is transcendental unity.

We can make various remarks about the properties of unity as such. These all beg the question, however, by assuming that we possess an intuitive grasp of unity, since the properties we designate are all either negative or relational. Unity is not many, just as it is visible as a relation of a multiplicity of units (each of which is subject to the same distinction). But each unity is not many in precisely the same way; and its visibility as a relation of units is not itself a relation that can be analyzed, but can only be asserted. There is no law of unity comparable to the law of identity, $x = x$ (which may also be written out more fully in the language of the predicate calculus).

The distinction between the unity and identity of form is pivotal for understanding the absurdity of the attempt to derive an alternative to metaphysics by distinguishing between Being and beings. A distinction between Being and beings can be drawn in only two ways. Either we refer to that which is common to every being (*on, res, Seiendes*), or we refer to some origination-process of beings. In the latter case, however, we arrive at what is unspeakable in any language that attributes thing-properties to things, since such a language could succeed only in reifying Being, or transforming it, whether in metaphors or through an ostensibly literal description, into a being. This takes place, for example, in Heidegger's later philosophy, where thing-words like "frame" and "round dance" are employed as metaphorical circumlocutions to evoke the sense of Being.

In the first of the two aforementioned alternatives, namely, the attempt to list the properties common to every being *qua* being, we might, like Aristotle, develop a schema of categories, which organize into distinct types all the properties of any being whatsoever. Aristotle's properties belong, however, not to being *qua* being, in his own definition, as *ousia*, that is, species-form; they belong,

like species-form itself, to substances, that is, to separate and compound beings, each with its own unity and identity. The many senses of being make it finally impossible to answer the question, "What is the sense of being?" Despite the primacy of *eidos*, there is no one sense of being underlying the diversity of senses in Aristotle's analyses (and one may think here of Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance). Each sense is a distinct identity. The ground of these identities is in each case their unity, which is always the same, and always inaccessible to discursive analysis.

It is impossible to maintain that being *qua* being is itself the schema of categories, since that would reduce being to discourse or a *façon de parler*. If one states conversely that being *qua* being is the exemplification of the structure represented schematically by the categories, then being *qua* being is transformed into a relation, namely, the relation of possessing a given structure. As is already obvious in the lack of a rigorous formulation of the schema, however, the givenness of the relation is indeterminate.

More precisely, each categorial schema is a multiplicity, and hence a particular identity, not a unity. Those who demand a transcendental deduction of the categories (as Fichte did of Kant) have understood that the demonstration of the completeness of a proposed table of categories is dependent upon a demonstration of the necessity of the unity of that table. There is no demonstration of unity, however; it is rather *from* unity, for example, the transcendental unity of apperception, that all demonstrations derive their own unity.

This is also so in the case of forms. It must be shown that all the features of a certain look are in place; but the attempt to show this depends upon an antecedent grasp of the completeness of the look. What does completeness mean here? It means that all the features are in place—that the look is a unity. But this is given; this we see. We see it, but we can not describe it. What we describe is the identity of the look that is given as a unity. This is what Aristotle means by saying that thinking is coming to rest, not change, and that the species-form is enacted at once, not as a progressive or sequential synthesis of before and after. This is why there is no demonstration or predication of essential properties but rather intellectual perception.

In logical terms, the relation of essence and attribute is that of "belonging." But belonging is not itself a phenomenological property; we may perceive one attribute as associated with another, but we cannot analyze the appearance except by imposing logical definitions, that is, linguistic stipulations, onto how things look to us. To say "*p* belongs to *S*" is a statement of a logical form that we stipulate as regulating associations of a certain kind. These stipulations, however, do not, as it were, superimpose the property of unity onto our perceptual associations. Again, the unity of the associations must be present as the condition of the visibility of the identity in any particular instance. This is so whether we are Kantians or Aristotelians. Unity does not arise from predication; predication assumes, that is, is with respect to, a unity to be identified.

The perception of any identity rests upon the unity of that identity as well as the unity of cognition or apprehension. But perception is also the occasion for the mutual presence of unity in the two senses. The unity of what one could call being *qua* being is given in, but not by, perception, and so it is presented within everyday pretheoretical experience. We therefore tend to confuse unity with identity, that is, with the multiplicity of the given as identifiable. The combination of these two facts leads to the blurring of identity and the dissolution of unity. This in turn transforms the relation from a metaphysical into a stipulative or conventional rule of language-use, as I argued above.

To be is to have an essence and so to possess both essential and accidental properties; but nothing can be said to verify the former, which accordingly become indistinguishable from the latter. We can attempt to avoid this difficulty by shifting from a schema of substantial properties (including essence as the property of the ultimate substrate) to a Platonic schema like the alphabet of noetic elements introduced in the *Sophist* by the Eleatic Stranger. The justification for such a shift would be that we require formal properties of every being, not an indeterminate relation, or an indeterminate list of the properties of beings, that is, *res* or *Seienden*.

The problem with a noetic alphabet of a Platonic kind is that its elements, such as being, one, same, other, and so on, cannot be

understood or analyzed in themselves, since none of them has an internal structure. Even if we postulate their independent being, we can do so only by implying that each of the others is combined with the element "being." As to "being," what can we say of it, without making use of the other elements? The attempt to constitute a metaphysics of noetic or eidetic elements leads inevitably to a dialectical logic of the Hegelian variety. This is to say that the process of attempting to think the elements becomes involved in the statement of the relational nature of the elements. Language, as it were, both assimilates the forms and bifurcates into the set of forms and the process by which they are cognized.

By referring to a categorial schema, we imply that being *qua* being is a structure rather than an element or entity, such as an *on*, *res*, or thing. This has two opposite dangers. First, the structure becomes hard, if not impossible, to distinguish from a particular conceptual analysis of beings; in this way, being, understood as the being of beings, turns into discursive thinking. Second, the structure is in each of its exemplifications a unity and an identity in two distinguishable senses: (i) as this being here, for example, a man, but also (ii) as this particular structure, common to all beings, rather than some other structure, for example, the Kantian categories. Even if we grant that the identity is in both cases discernible, nothing can be said about the unity of these identities. Hence no reason can be given as to why these identities should not change, that is, *lose their identity*, and so become historicized.

Again, Aristotle makes no attempt to answer this last question; he begins from the "that" (*to hoti*) and offers no explanation of why there are beings, or how a man is a man, other than to say, "through his *ousia* or *eidos*." But this is to grant the facticity of metaphysics, and so its contingency: we are on the road to doctrines of transcendental temporality and historicity, as well as to linguistic conventionalism. In fact, the Aristotelian solution to all these problems is precisely the one that has been rejected by Aristotle's contemporary "analytical" interpreters, who are all neo-Kantians or Wittgensteinians, and who believe that stipulative rules as well as a doctrine of predication will define all questions as well as their possible answers.

In my view, however, what we require is neither rules nor predications, hence certainly not a schema of categories, but a straightforward assertion of noetic perception. We cannot explain the unity of a given identity, and this means finally that we perceive it. To perceive unity, however, is also to perceive Being, and precisely in the sense of being *qua* being, that is, the being of beings. Being underlies being *qua* being, and is accessible to us in its gift of unity. Unity, so to speak, is the ultimate substratum of identity. Being is not a structure, because structure is always particular, or possesses an identity, and so is this structure as opposed to that structure.

If the preceding analysis is on the right track then the consequence is plain: metaphysics is rooted in the silence of noetic perception, not of this form as this form, but of this or that form as unity, that is, as a unified identity. Once we have the perception, then discourse, or analysis of the identity, and so metaphysics proper, becomes possible. Noetic perception designates the units of being, and hence of thinking. But it does not provide us with an account of the "essential structure" of unity, because there is none. For this reason identities may change without in any way violating the omnipresence of unity.

These changes are no longer to be explained as changes in the conceptual map by which we carve up reality, that is, by linguistic conventions or stipulations. Instead, changes in conceptual maps are to be explained as shifts in our perception of identities. The extralinguistic status of the identities is given by their unity, because unity can never be given by linguistic rules. We cannot decide to consider a certain cluster of formal elements as a unity if it is visibly dissolving. Nor can we be mistaken about the unity of identities; all mistakes are about identities. We establish the identity about which we make mistakes because of the unity through which that identity is given. I would therefore say that Aristotle is right to orient metaphysics by everyday experience and noetic perception. It is Aristotelianism that errs in seeking for a discursive science of metaphysics.

I am under no illusion that the preceding paragraphs will suffice to persuade my readers of the claim, to which I subscribe, that unity is a sign of Being. My hope is that they will serve to indicate how

metaphysics is possible even though not actual. It may be easier to accept the refutation of the claim that metaphysics is a science of being *qua* being in the sense of the derivation of a schema of categories. In addition, I see no alternative to the thesis that metaphysics is possible if and only if we can distinguish between formal identity and Being. At the same time, however, I hold strongly to the view that nothing, or next to nothing, can be said about Being. This is why I contend that metaphysics is rooted in silence. Unity reveals itself as concealed by a particular identity. This is the ancestor of the Being that reveals itself as concealed by a particular being.

I come now to my conclusion. Being *qua* being, *pace* Aristotle, is not a categorial schema, nor is it the exemplification of a structure. *Pace* Heidegger, it is indeed that which is common to all beings, but in a sense very close to his own understanding of a Being that must be distinguished from every *res* or from *Seiendes*. Whereas I deplore Heidegger's own attempt to develop a "new" or "poetic" thinking about Being, I judge it to be a defective version of Platonism, namely, the attempt to elicit the senses of Being in myths, poetic dramas, and even in simple accounts of how philosophy emerges from everyday life.

From this standpoint, metaphysics does not depend upon silence; but neither does it depend upon the elaboration of a spurious "new" language. Metaphysics depends upon the ordinary language of everyday life, as deepened and articulated by poetic imagination. This in turn is rooted firmly in the silence of the given. We cannot talk sensibly unless we see what we are talking about. All attempts to derive seeing from talking (or from writing) lead finally to the chaos of infinite chatter, which is refuted, not by some alternative metaphysical hypothesis, but by life itself.

Notes

- 1 [This paper was given as the Presidential Address to the Metaphysical Society of America, Pennsylvania State University, March 8, 1991.-ed.] I was materially assisted in the improvement of this paper by long discussions of earlier versions with four students: Alfredo Ferrarin, Alessandra Fussi, Sylvia Benso, and Luciano Cordo.

- 2 Martin Heidegger, *Beiträge zur Philosophie* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1989), pp. 5, 20.
- 3 *Phaedrus* 245c9.
- 4 *De Anima* 411a27.
- 5 *De Anima* 405b31, 407a32, 434a16.
- 6 *Phaedrus* 248a1 f.
- 7 *De Anima* 429a1, 431a16.
- 8 *De Anima* 431b21.
- 9 I am grateful to my student, Alfredo Ferrarin, whose persistent criticism of earlier versions of this point has led me to see their inadequacy. My thanks also to Alessandra Fussi, who ably supported Ferrarin's criticism.
- 10 See "Much Ado About Nothing" in my *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 1988).
- 11 See "Heidegger's Interpretation of Plato," in *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry*, pp. 127–47.
- 12 For detailed discussion of this, see my book *Plato's Sophist* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; Reprint: South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 1999).
- 13 *Phaedo* 100a3; *Philebus* 16d1.
- 14 *Metaphysics* 1003a33.
- 15 *Posterior Analytics* 90b33.
- 16 *Metaphysics* 1034a6, 1038a33.
- 17 *Posterior Analytics* 100b7. Cf. *Nicomachean Ethics* 1040b31.
- 18 *Nicomachean Ethics* 1040b31.
- 19 *Metaphysics* 981b27–29, 982b7–9.
- 20 See note 10 above.
- 21 *Posterior Analytics* 73b26.
- 22 In particular, in Bk. 7, Ch. 13; see the commentary by Frede and Patzig to this passage in their *Aristoteles, Metaphysik Z, Text, Übersetzung, und Kommentar*, 1 (Munich: C. H. Beck Verlag, 1988), Bd. 2, p. 241.
- 23 *Posterior Analytics* 90b33.
- 24 *Metaphysics* 1034a6, 1038a33.

CHAPTER TEN

Socrates' Dream

I

My remarks in this paper are part of an ongoing attempt to understand the nature, and therefore the limits, of analytical thinking. As a friend of clarity and precision, I have no intention of attacking the use of analysis in philosophy. My suggestion is rather that clarity and precision have different faces. To take the comprehensive example, it would be an error to address the question of the context of analysis, and therefore the question, "What is analysis?" with exactly and only those tools we employ in the task of analysis itself. It seems to me that this observation should be regarded as a truism, but I also believe that it is being widely disregarded. As I understand the contemporary situation in academic philosophy, at least in the United States, the most adventurous thinkers, surely the most fashionable in any case, are once again dreaming Socrates' dream.

In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates refers to the doctrine of simple elements as a dream, and subjects it to some criticisms which, as I shall contend, are unsatisfactory. This is because the criticisms are based upon an acceptance of the same principle as underlies the doctrine of elements itself. Socrates, as it were, is also dreaming that thinking, and therefore philosophy, is equivalent to analyzing: to *dianoia* or *logismos*. It is this premise that leads Socrates to insist that knowledge of a whole is the same as knowledge of the sum of its parts. In this case, if there is to be knowledge at all, it must result from the analysis of a complex into its essential parts. And this gives rise to the question how we are acquainted with the relevant complex. Some analysts might wish to exclude this question from philosophy, and assign it to psychology. The *Theaetetus* seems to provide them with a paradigm, since in that dialogue, there is no mention of intellectual intuition. The discursive arguments are instead

interspersed with rhetorical and poetical accounts of the psychology of the philosopher. It should not be overlooked, however, that for Plato, both these procedures are part of the philosophical activity. If we deny this, other interesting questions remain. How do we know that a given complex is *relevant* to our epistemic intentions? In the steps of analysis, how do we know what to do next, as distinct from knowing how to do what is required? And if a complex is a sum of parts, how do we know when we have isolated the "essential" parts of a given complex? Stated somewhat more abstractly, is the nature of the unity of a whole (at any level of internal complexity) the same as the unity of a sum of countable parts?

By "Socrates' dream," then, I mean initially the attempt to define philosophy exclusively as analytical thinking or, to employ the pertinent Cartesian phrase, as *ordo et mensura*. But such a dream is unable to deal philosophically with itself as a dream. One either ignores questions of context, or of the nature and significance of analysis, or one attempts to restate them as technical problems, internal to analysis itself. As a result, the most fundamental questions are either forgotten or distorted. In historical terms, one forgets to ask what is the nature of a Platonic dialogue, or of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, or Descartes' *Meditations* and *Discourse on Method*. It is assumed that the rhetorical mode of presentation of philosophical analysis is like Wittgenstein's (or Hegel's) ladder to the absolute. Once we have arrived at the destination, we may kick the ladder away. Analytical philosophy is then able to defend itself against charges of a lack of self-consciousness only by sustaining these charges, or by a kind of ironical rudeness toward its accusers, reminiscent of attacks against religion by the 18th century *philosophes*.

However, I have somewhat oversimplified the actual situation for the sake of clarity. Actually, one notes today, side by side with the extraordinary increase in technical subtlety, a loss of orientation concerning the validity or significance of analytical (and so rational) thinking. If thinking is analyzing, then significance cannot be an end or intention; it must be given to analysis from the outset. For otherwise, the end of analysis will be an element. If it is simple, then it will be unknowable; if again complex, then our calling it an

end is purely conventional, since every complex is subject to further analysis. Analysis cannot *arrive* at its own justification. But is this justification visible from the outset? I think that it is not. For if it were, the presuppositions of analysis would be "given" apodictically, and analysis would be replaced by phenomenology. Or else philosophy itself will be replaced by ideology, to which it must succumb in view of its incapacity to explain itself. Am I wrong to detect in this connection a certain "greening" of American academic philosophy? I shall forbear from being more specific on this delicate point. Suffice it to say that, in my opinion, the movement of philosophical analysis is internal expansion and external or fundamental erosion. The great danger is thus dissipation into nothingness.

If philosophy is analysis, and this in turn is the division of complexes into elements, then what lovers of wisdom must love are altogether inaccessible simple elements. Love, when frustrated, may turn to moderation for solace: this, in a way, is the legacy of the later Wittgenstein, who tells us in effect to enjoy this or that analysis, as relative to this or that intention. The intentions are furnished by everyday life, but life is itself defined or "formed" by our linguistic horizon, that is, by the context of analysis. Nothing rational can be said about the significance of the horizon, since to speak rationally is already to be in place within that horizon. We cannot, as I would say, be "put into the picture" or "see the whole picture" because we are already within the picture. And so moderation turns into another, less salutary inflection of frustrated love: thoughtless activity. Whereas we are not told to dream Socrates' dream, this is because we are in fact dreaming a still deeper dream of the horizon or *Lebensform*. Wittgenstein tells us to awaken within the deeper dream, that is, to analyze, and thus to construct or "create" analytical sums. But he also tells us to forget the dream-like nature of our waking activity. One way to phrase the question which has motivated this essay is to ask what is the true or waking account of dreaming? However, it is both reasonable and necessary to approach this question as residents of the whole picture, not as its sole creator. In less poetic language. I want to sketch here certain ways in which analytical thinking leads us directly to its own limits.

II

I have taken my bearings by a passage from the *Theaetetus*, and so indirectly by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. But my remarks are intended to apply to philosophy in all of its manifestations. As a transition from the opening section of this essay to what follows, I offer this observation. Analytical thinking requires simple elements. Yet, if we restrict ourselves to analytical thinking, simple elements are impossible. This is the central problem that arises from Socrates' dream. Let us now explore some of the details. As I noted above, Socrates follows his criticism of the doctrine of simple elements by constraining Theaetetus, against his initial inclination, to agree that the whole is the same as the "all" or sum of its parts. We may be inclined to sympathize with Theaetetus, and to find this identification disturbing. To begin with, it is in conflict with our ordinary experience. There are wholes, like organic unities, that do not readily (or at all) lend themselves to analysis into countable parts. And there are wholes, like an army or city, that surely cannot be adequately understood as a sum of elements. One might suppose that Socrates means something harmless here, namely, that if one counts up the parts of a given whole, their sum cannot designate a unity other than that of the whole. This of course assumes that the whole has parts. If the view is in fact harmless, it is not what Socrates has in mind. He identifies the whole and the sum of its parts in order to illustrate the thesis that knowledge of the parts is knowledge of the whole. I pass by the obvious counter-argument that one does not know what an army is, by knowing how many soldiers it contains. Instead, I note a second reason why the identification of the whole with the sum of its parts is disturbing. If there are no simple elements, or "clear and distinct" boundaries to analysis, in what sense can we say that there are wholes?

In considering this question, we distinguish between two senses of "simple." The first sense is "having no parts," and the second is "not subject to further analysis." Points, or Aristotle's mathematical units, may serve as examples of the first sense of "simple." But we cannot distinguish one point from another, except with reference to a matrix of spatial co-ordinates. If a whole is the same as the sum

of its parts, and if these parts are simple qua not themselves having any parts, then wholes themselves become indistinguishable from each other, or reduce to points. Or else all wholes are systems of spatial co-ordinates, an alternative which, for all practical purposes, reduces to the first. This is enough to enforce the conclusion that, if there are wholes, and wholes are sums of their parts, then these parts cannot be simple in the first sense of the term. Now let us consider the second sense. We define "simple" in some such way as this: "that which is destroyed by analysis, or else immediately replaced, by the act of analysis, with some structure other than the one to which we initially addressed ourselves." This formulation could be improved, but I trust that it conveys my point with sufficient clarity. To use Socratic language, take the form *man*. No doubt there are various attributes which one would have to state, in the process of explaining what one means by "man." But the sum of the terms in our explanation of "man" would not be the same as the unity of the whole form *man*. In arriving at what we call the essential attributes of "man," we certainly do not dissolve the form into its constituent elements. In contemporary language, if there is such a thing as a concept of man, all analyses of this concept must proceed with respect to an apprehension of the significance of that concept as a unity. This does not mean that the significance of the concept as a unity is the same as the results of our analysis, or that such an analysis is superfluous. It does mean that analysis is not a random or "blind" process. The intelligibility of the analytical procedure derives from our seeing, and seeing as significant, the complex unity which we are analyzing. This complex unity does not take shape as a consequence of analysis. On the contrary, it guides every step of analysis. Stated in slightly different terms, analysis is annihilation unless we can see what we are doing: seeing is not analyzing, any more than knowing is the summing of parts. In order for parts to "add up" into a whole (and thus to become genuine parts), they must be seen as parts of a whole. We may be inclined to call this *of* or belonging-relation by the name of predication. But the act of seeing a whole as a unity is not the same as seeing a collection of elements.

On the basis of the second sense of "simple" we may offer an approximate definition of wholes as articulated unities of other articulated unities called "elements." By way of anticipation, I claim that the unsatisfactory features of this delusion arise, not from the fact that some other analysis of the whole is superior, but that no analysis can ever be adequate to the task. To go more slowly, the articulations within the whole and its elements make possible the application of analytical techniques; the unities guide this application. In shifting from our apprehension of the comprehensive unity to its ingredient or element-units, we shift from one structure to another. At each level of structure, the unity of the whole is visible as the basis for analysis, yet it cannot itself be analyzed without dissolving the unity of the level. If thinking is identical with analyzing, then unity at each level is invisible, which is to say that ordered structures are unthinkable, and so too must be "wholes" and "parts." In other words, unless there are simply elements, which cannot be replaced by further analyses of their ingredients, but which must be perceived as a unity that *regulates*, and so is antecedent to, further analyses, then there cannot be any sums of elements counting as wholes. Each ostensible whole is merely a resting-stage of an infinite process of analysis, and so, each stage is incipiently collapsing, or actually unintelligible. Instead of saying that we think such-and-such, or know that such-and-such is so-and-so, we can only observe that, as we speak, this is how things look to us, or how we use terms, how we speak now. I will not pursue the questions of what "now" could mean on this hypothesis about thinking and knowing.

Suffice it to say that Socrates' failure to distinguish the two senses of "simple," for whatever his reasons, and his consequent rejection of the intelligibility of simple elements, leaves equally unintelligible his claim that a whole is the same as the sum of its parts. For we do not know what "same" means here. It certainly cannot mean "in one-to-one correspondence," since that requires us to conceive, and indeed to construct, two distinct sums. Put otherwise, the concept of one-to-one correspondence is itself a unity distinct from the co-ordinate x 's and y 's of sets X and Y . When I see that X and Y are the same, I see something other than the one-to-one correspondence

of their individual elements. It therefore seems to me that the entire discussion of knowing in the *Theaetetus*, if we take it out of its dramatic context in the usual style of analytical interpreters, is unintelligible, because Socrates never mentions *noēsis* or the intellectual intuition of unity. In the analytical sections of this dialogue, he takes it for granted that thinking, and hence knowing, is *dianoia* or discursive analysis.

Whether wholes are forms or functions, they cannot be the same as numerical sums. Not even the unity of a sum is the same as the sum of its units. A relation of order is not an element in the domain of the relation. No number is an element of itself. And yet, forms, functions, or relations are not nothing. Let me illustrate this point in another way. Consider the analysis of the basic or "simple" structure of the proposition. From Aristotle to Strawson, this structure has normally been explained as a combination of subject and predicate. In the Fregean analysis, the symbol for the predicate or concept comes equipped with a number of blanks (the number depending upon the nouns in the sentence from which the concept has been extracted), into which name-variables may be inserted. It looks here as though the ordinary-language distinction of subject and predicate is no longer retained. What we actually have is a reinterpretation of this distinction, or a disregard of the surface grammatical structure in favor of a presumably deeper analysis which entails the application of the mathematical concept of the function. Subject and predicate are redefined, but not dropped entirely, from the logical analysis of the structure of the simple proposition. In the Strawsonian analysis, to take a recent contrasting interpretation, the structure of ordinary language, rather than of mathematics, is paradigmatic; the basic form of the proposition is symbolized as $\text{ass}(i, c)$ where $\text{ass}()$ expresses the function of propositional combination, i is the symbol for a particular (= the subject), and c for a concept (= the predicate).¹ For our purposes, there is no significant difference between the Fregean and the Strawsonian analyses. But perhaps the problem I have in mind is easier to visualize in Strawson's schema.

In this schema, we have a symbol, " $\text{ass}()$," which designates combination or unity of subject and predicate, but (as Strawson

emphasizes) *not a concept*. I presume that Strawson does not mean to deny that a function is a concept, but wishes instead to distinguish the uniform application of this concept in all propositions, that is, as distinct from the concept symbolized by *c* and combined with *i*. We can already see that, if the function of combination is a concept, and is present in every proposition, then the unity and intelligibility of a proposition depends upon a concept that cannot be the sum of its parts. But this is the least that can be said. The unity and intelligibility of each proposition seems to be the same in all cases; it is both internal and external to the individual case, as one might say. In order to make clear the consequences of this odd fact, I have to introduce an Aristotelian digression.

Aristotle's analysis of predication, as one could easily show, is at many points the same as Strawson's. But even where they differ, namely, in Aristotle's doctrine of *ousia*, the net result is the same. According to Aristotle, the "substratum" of predication is the *ousia* or species-form, which is grasped by noetic intuition (and I am bypassing predication of individual instances of a species as irrelevant to my present concern). But the *ousia* is not directly accessible to discursive or analytical thinking. What we say of an *ousia* is either its affirmative or its negative predicates: the *parousiai* or *apousiai*.² These are, as the Greek names state, present to, or absent from, the *ousia*. They are not the same as the *ousia*, which is rather the way of presence and absence. For this reason, all talk of essential attributes is either circular, or it assumes the intuition of *ousia* as antecedent to and regulative of predication. Those who attempt to distinguish between essential and accidental attributes by recourse to criteria of linguistic use are simply not paying attention to the problem. A criterion of "essentiality" cannot be based upon how we normally define our terms. Linguistic definitions are always subject to alternative analyses: it is scarcely a mark of analytical rigor to define "necessarily" as "customarily." And in fact, we "define" terms by a process that depends upon perceptions of unities, which perceptions are not sums or statistical averages of uses of these terms. It is a good Fregean point, as Michael Dummett emphasizes, "that a grasp of the senses of our words cannot, in general, consist in verbalizable

knowledge."³ I take this to mean necessarily that the verbal is rooted in the intuitive. And my point is that we intuit, among other things, essential unity and wholeness.

Since the discursive intelligence analyzes and synthesizes, in the specific sense of manipulating parts (= saying something of something), it cannot have access to the *ousia* or *to ti ēn einai*, the simple unity of the this-ness of the given species-form, which is "simple" in the sense of a unity of subsequent analyses. To predicate is to say something of something else, but the "of-ness" or unity of belonging cannot be further analyzed. To say that *p* belongs to *s* is not to explain what "belonging" means. It does not distinguish between "seems to be" or "usually go together" and "cannot be otherwise." And even if it did, to say that *s* cannot be otherwise than *p* is not to give an analysis of *ousia* as the unity of *s* and *p*. To return to Strawson, he does not seem to suspect that his analysis preserves the Aristotelian doctrine of the *ousia* as present but inaccessible to predication, i.e., to the analytical intelligence. The "presence" of *ousia* is not the *parousia* of its (essential) attributes. In fact, "ass()" provides us with a phantom linguistic reification of Aristotle's ontological copula. Just as a set of predicates, affirmative or negative, is not the same as the *ousia* it is intended to designate, so too the assertion of combination is not a sign for the unity intrinsic to the meaning of the proposition. Even worse, since Strawson claims that the combinatorial function is not a concept, but a sign of general linguistic activity, if we take him at his word, it must stand for the human capacity to create meanings rather than to refer to them, and this contrary to Strawson's own intentions. Furthermore, if philosophy, or rational thought, is conceptual analysis, then since the combinatorial function is not a concept, "general linguistic activity" must be inaccessible to rational, i.e., analytical, thinking. We find ourselves, amusingly enough, in the presence, within Strawson's sober analyses, of the absolute *Geist* or *Ich* of German Idealism.

In the Fregean schema, the problem is perhaps obscured by the technical ease with which concepts are distinguished from their instances, and so too the ease with which the logical analysis of statements charts the functional relation of the variables. We may

forget that the unity to which I am addressing myself is already present in the statement which we subject to mathematical analysis. I refer to the unity underlying both the surface and the deep structure, or the precondition of any analysis. In any case, nothing is said to explain the unity of instance and concept, the Fregean version of Platonic *methexis* and Aristotelian *huparchein*. This of course makes sense from a mathematical standpoint. The mathematician is concerned with operations; he wants to be told how to employ the epsilon-relation, or how to subsume instances under concepts. The transfer of mathematical techniques to philosophy certainly facilitates our analyses in one sense. But it covers over rather than removes the philosophical problems. The invisible or inaccessible *ousia* now lurks in the language of functions and variables. Let me sketch the issue in terms of the analytical meaning of "existence."

The analyses of Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein, and so too of their successors, begin with the assumption that to be is to be countable. This assumption represents one-half of a more complex situation in Greek philosophy. In the contemporary doctrine, the question of "being" is replaced from the outset by the question of existence. Contemporary scholars have engaged in much disputation as to whether Plato and Aristotle distinguished between being and existence. It would take me too far afield to explore the issue in detail. I must, however, say just enough to show the similarities and the difference between the classical and the contemporary view. I shall be very brief about Plato. There is a quite clear distinction in the *Theaetetus* (185c-186b) between "essence" or *ousia* and "existence" or instance in the domain of genesis (*estin*). What "exists" is the sensuous instance of the form or kind we wish to define. The instance, in other words, is countable by virtue of its form. Furthermore, the *ousia* becomes accessible to us by way of sense-perception. This, of course, is the meaning of the so-called doctrine of recollection. We are "reminded" of Ideas by our basically sensuous experience of (countable) particulars in this world. There are, then, no Ideas of non-existing things.

This is the basis upon which Aristotle builds his own doctrine. But it would not be easy to point to a passage in which Aristotle

clearly distinguishes between "being" and "existing." He does, of course, distinguish between *ousia* or species-form and sensuous individuals. But it could be objected that sentences often translated with the verb "exists," as for example "Socrates exists," actually mean, upon analysis, that Socrates is an instance of the species-form "man."⁴ In my opinion, even if this is the correct analysis, it makes the distinction I have in mind. Just as in the case of Plato, the difference between "being" and "existence" corresponds to the difference between *ousia* as species-form and *ousia* as concrete individual. The famous passage in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, where Aristotle says that the expressions "one man," "man," and "existing man" all refer to the same thing, does not contradict this point.⁵ Aristotle is here arguing that unit and being are not distinct. He is not asserting that there is no fundamental difference between the species-form and the individual.

And this, I think, takes us to the heart of the difficulty in Aristotle. Whereas the senses of unity are the same as those of being, there are manifestly different senses of being, and the most dramatic is that between the species-form and the concrete individual or "subject." The unity of a species-form cannot possibly be identical with that of a concrete individual. The distinctness of the species-form is that of the unit as measure. It is not that of a number or sum of units. "Being" in the primary sense (whatever stand we take on "exists" in Aristotle) is uncountable because it is the measure of counting beings in the secondary sense. The easiest way in which to explain this distinction in English is to use the terms "being" and "existence," but whatever terms we use, the situation remains the same.

The situation, as I have emphasized, is ambiguous. To begin with, it is worth noting that, just as in the case of Plato, the species-form is picked out via sense-perception. Only "existing" things have essences. Investigation must begin with the *that*, or with what exists. In the *that*, we pick out what exists by intuiting the "what" or *ousia*, and this in turn enables us to count or collect together the individuals. It is possible to count individuals because there are many of each kind. But the unity of the species-form must be both the same as, and other than, the unity of the individuals. It is the same,

because to be a man is defined by the species-form. It is other, because the individual is himself a sum of attributes, accidental as well as essential. And what are we to make of the fact that there are many distinct species-forms? We might wish to say that these are countable in the same way that individuals are countable. But since counting proceeds by a measure or kind, which is also a species, it would follow that species-forms were collectable into one species, and this, of course, Aristotle regularly denies. The harsh truth is that there is no clear and distinct answer by Aristotle to this problem of the unity and multiplicity of *ousiai* or species-forms. I note in passing that, if "being qua being" is understood as god, who is defined as thinking thinking itself, it is still the case that the species-forms are distinct from god, and related to pure thinking by a *pros hen* relation, not by unity. If god is taken as the unity of *ousiai*, then Aristotle is transformed into Hegel (by way of Neo-Platonism).

Aristotle's *ousiai* are the ancestors of contemporary predicates. Those who, like W. V. Quine, have reservations concerning the quantification over predicates are therefore renewing the ambiguity in the Aristotelian situation, but with the added difficulty that they deny the *ousia* as an essential unity. So whether we are ancients or moderns, if there is no distinction between "being" and "existence," a grave problem arises concerning the ontological status of predicates or concepts. For we must now assume that "exists" means "is quantifiable." Existentially quantified statements are built up from atomic statements of the form *Fa*. But the legitimacy of quantifying *Fa* depends upon the knowledge that there is an individual with the property designated by *F*. Since *Fa* is atomic, it is not possible to analyze the *a* further, or assert its existence meaningfully except by describing it via another property, say *C*. In this case, *Fa* is complex. So it looks as if we cannot arrive at existing elements by analytical devices. Instead, we must apparently stipulate them in one way or another. This is the simplest formulation of the background for the two main approaches to existence statements, which we may represent by Russell and Strawson. I want to make one or two remarks about each representative, merely to exemplify the relation between the problem of existence and that of unity.

Let us take Russell first. He begins with the assumption that names denote the objects for which they stand. Therefore, a proposition containing a name as a subject-term must presuppose the existence of the object it denotes. But a singular existence assertion, e.g., "Socrates exists," is meaningless. In order to have a meaning, such a statement must be capable of being negated. However, since names denote, "Socrates does not exist" is self-contradictory. Similarly, "Socrates exists" is redundant; the predicate adds nothing to the subject. I suppose it has been pointed out on numerous occasions that this interpretation rests upon the assumption that Socrates *does* exist. Yet the fact that he exists cannot be meaningfully asserted. Russell then introduces the notion of the propositional function, and (as he claims) shifts from the surface grammatical form to the deeper logical form. "Socrates exists" then becomes "there is at least one *x* such that *x* is a human and *x* is named Socrates." The name becomes an element of the predicate; failure to pick out an *x* with such a name no longer cancels the meaning of the statement. "Exists" is then defined as "satisfies a propositional function." But this amounts to saying that existence is defined as the belonging-relation of an element in a class or an instance of a concept. So part of the Aristotelian doctrine of predication (something belongs to something) is retained, only in the guise of quantification-theory, which replaces the *ousia* by a propositional function.

Let us add a word about definite descriptions. These are built up on the basis of atomic statements and propositional functions. The question whether there exist any so-and-so's denoted by expressions of the form "the so-and-so" is avoided in the familiar way. The expression "the so-and-so" is translated as (to abbreviate the whole business) "there is a unique *x* such that (say) *Fx* and *Gx*." It is obvious that the meaning of this statement depends upon the assumption of the existence of an *x* with properties designated as *F* and *G*. Yet that assumption, as we have just seen, is analytically meaningless. I suppose that Russell believes himself to have avoided these difficulties by his invocation of the philosophical necessity of a highly developed "sense of reality." Presumably, then, we talk only about real objects as existing. But this looks circular. If to exist is to

be real, whereas to be real is to exist, then the question of existence must be settled empirically or by stipulation, rather than by the shift from grammatical to logical form. If all that can be said of "exists" is finally that it is synonymous with "something," whereas "something" is defined by the epsilon relation or as an instance of a concept, then we still need a criterion for distinguishing between real and imaginary concepts. Besides, is it really satisfactory to explain existence by means of concepts? If "real" means "empirically available," are not all concepts unreal? In this case, how can an instance of what is unreal be called "real" by virtue of being such an instance? In short, if we need to be directly acquainted with existing things, this must transpire either by sense-perception or by intuition. In the latter case, we return to Aristotle, in the former, by an indirect route, we turn into Strawson.

Strawson dispenses, of course, with intellectual intuition, and so (by intention) with *ousiai* or simple elements. He takes it for granted that we know the meanings of our utterances and the intentions of our acts in a publicly certifiable manner. This public manner is not simply through sense-perception, since we can "carve up" (Dummett's phrase) or "articulate" the world of objects in various ways. Each such carving produces a context of discourse (and so of analysis). Furthermore, there are unending sub-articulations within each comprehensive articulation. As a result, the meaning of "exists" depends upon the particular context of discourse. In place of the ostensible dangers of intellectual intuition, or of infinite imaginary objects. Strawson substitutes an apparently unending number of senses of "exists."

The Strawsonian approach, which is in fact based upon the later doctrines of Wittgenstein, seems to raise as many difficulties as the Russellian approach. In the first place, what is to prevent us from coming eventually to senses of "exist" which are virtually private, as for example, shared only by extremely small groups of specialists? We cannot rely upon sense-perception to furnish existing objects, since the perceived continuum can be articulated in various ways (some of them by specialists who are unintelligible to the general public). In the second place, Strawson's account seems

to oversimplify the problem of distinguishing between real and imaginary objects. What if I begin a story by saying: "Once upon a time there was a millionaire..." Am I not referring to an empirically existing object by a signal that no such objects exist? Third and most comprehensively, how do we account for the unity of our initial grasp of "exists," which leads us to distinguish its various senses? To be told that these senses have no unity, but possess instead a family resemblance, is to assume that knowledge of the whole is the same as knowledge of the sum of the parts, with the fatal addition that we deny the whole from the outset. We soon come to the need to stipulate by rules or criteria of some kind what exists. And this seems to be the procedure of mathematics, not of ordinary language. Unlike Aristotle, the ordinary-language philosopher has not learned the decisive lesson of everyday life. The unity of the units of experience cannot be explained analytically or constructively. Strawson fluctuates between Aristotelian and Kantian procedures, and this leaves no clear resolution to the problem of existence.

I hope I have said enough to substantiate the assertion that analytical philosophy has an extraordinarily difficult time of it with respect to existence. This difficulty is closely connected to the suppression of *ousia*, or the redefinition of "being" as "existence." But even if the Aristotelian *ousia* were rehabilitated, nothing rational could be said of it, so long as we equate "rational" with predicative or analytical discourse. The net result of technical considerations like those I have mentioned, is this: the shift from classical to contemporary logic fails to remove us from the orbit of classical conceptions of *dianoia* or *logismos*. It worsens the situation by suppressing intellectual intuition, which, by the way, it understands from the outset by analogy with predication, as is clear from the treatment of simple elements in Wittgenstein and Russell. And it fails to give any account of the unity of the proposition. I purposely choose the existential proposition as my example, since it purports to be actually talking about "something," i.e., a unity. But what is the principle of that unity? It cannot be the x , since the x is neither this nor that. The bounded or quantified x possesses a contingent unity as defined by its predicates, say F and G . But these cannot stand for the source of unity,

since either or both may be false, i.e., fail to be instantiated (since we do not yet know the difference between real and imaginary predicates). This leaves nothing but the propositional function itself which, like the Hegelian Absolute, is common to all instances of unity that purportedly exist. And we still do not know what it means to "exist." The function of units is then common to meaningless, or finally, uncountable units. The suppression of the difference between being and existence leads, not to clarity about existence, but to its disappearance. We can explain neither unity nor existence, since both are modifications of being or *ousia*, which is in turn inaccessible to analysis: uncountable and unspeakable.

To recur for a moment to Strawson's schema, it seems to simplify the justification for quantifying over predicates by remaining closer to ordinary language. There is no temptation to quantify the function of combination, which is clearly distinguished from the predicative function of specifying concepts or attributes. At the same time, his schema is self-defeating, since it separates the combining function from the predicate qua sign of a concept. If it is the predicate that combines, and if a predicate specifies a concept, then why is combination not a concept, and indeed, the same concept as that which combines with the particular? On the other hand, if combining is a non-conceptual function of predicates, then we return to the distinction between predicate or attribute, and *ousia* or discursively unifying essence. Quine's analysis, against which Strawson here objects, is an adaptation of Frege's. He transforms simple predicates into nouns with two-place predicates. Thus "Socrates swims" becomes "swimming is performed by Socrates," or "Performs (swimming, Socrates)." In this notation, only nouns are quantifiable, but the combining or unifying function is even less visible than in Strawson's paradigm. We are, so to speak, led by the hand to insert subject-terms in exactly the right slots. These instances can never be confused with their predicates or concepts. But the hand that leads us is invisible, at least to analytical thinking.

The invisible hand of unity cannot, I think, be explained in the Aristotelian style of co-ordinating the senses of "one" with those of "being." This, incidentally, is another locus of agreement between

Aristotle and modern analytical philosophy. For Aristotle, we can explain why something is something else, because there is a specific "through which" or cause in each case. But we cannot explain why something is itself, since "there is one *logos* and one cause in all cases."⁶ We cannot explain the unity of the species-form, because this just amounts to identity, and to say that something is identical to itself is just to say that it is itself. By the same argument, "is" in the sense of "exists" may be applied to every subject. And this corresponds to Michael Dummett's interpretation, in the Fregean context, of "exists" and "is identical with" as permissible but *vacuous* predicates. They add no new information about their subjects.⁷ Nor, we add, could they, since "information" is defined as the result of analytical or predicative thinking. Dummett's vacuous predicates point directly toward my interpretation of the inaccessibility of Aristotle's *ousia*. Since the primary sense of "being" is *ousia*, and since *ousia* is primarily *eidos*, the analytical account of an *eidos* is always of its properties or predicates, and never of the unity of those properties. The problem of the essential unity of an *eidos* or subject is thus exactly the same as that of the unity of the proposition.

It is also worth noting, although I shall not develop the point here, that the problem of essential unity is closely connected with that of non-being; both are traditionally resolved in analytical philosophy by syntactical devices which simplify thinking as *logismos* or calculation, but which do so by ignoring entirely the difficulty. For example, if one applies set-theoretical techniques to the question of non-being, one may be tempted to say, as does David Wiggins, that the second-level concept of a first level concept of no extension "is a property-like account of *nothing*. Its extensional counterpart would be "the extension of the concept 'concept with no extension' or $\{\{A\}\}$, the unit-set of the null-set. Both relate to *nothing* as applied within the domain of individuals..."⁸ This is a clear case of begging the question, since the philosophically most serious sense of *nothing* cannot have an extensional counterpart. Whatever the requirements of predicative discourse, *nothing* is not a concept. To call it such is already to reify it, or to make it "something," as is obvious from the fact that $\{\{A\}\}$ is a common definition

of the number 2. Perhaps Wiggins was thinking subconsciously of Plato's unlimited dyad when he wrote the article from which I cite. The inadequacy of his approach is closely related to that of the Fregean thesis that the distinction between affirmative and negative is not intrinsic to the thought but to its linguistic expression. If one restricts oneself to the usual sense of "thought," namely, in the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition, of "thinking something," then what Frege says may be sound. But what about the case of thinking nothing? To say that this is not a genuine thought is to overlook the puzzle discussed briefly in Plato's *Sophist*, concerning Parmenides' injunction against saying "the altogether not." If this is unspeakable and unthinkable, then how can we enjoin ourselves or anyone else from speaking or thinking it? To shift at once to the set-theoretical interpretation à la Wiggins is to pay no attention to the puzzle, not to solve it.

Being and nothing, as the greatest philosophers have always understood, are closely connected. I have been arguing that unity as whole rather than sum is another aspect of this issue. If one wishes to apply mathematical concepts to its clarification, it seems to me more reasonable to reflect upon the significance of the various limitation-theorems, as well as upon the notions of order-type or rank of complexity of structure. In the famous formulation, we know some things to be true which cannot be proven in the system within which they are true. To state this in another way, each level of structure is intelligible as a unity, thanks to the presence of a function or concept of a higher level, which is thus not a part of the sum of the elements of that unity. More important for my immediate purpose, whereas one may analyze the elements of a given rank, or the expression of that rank, it is both impossible and senseless to try to analyze the unity of the unifying function as it applies to the unified elements. There is no concept of unity, if "concept" is understood discursively or analytically. We have to *see* that such-and-such a configuration is a unity rather than a heap; and when we come to express discursively what we have seen, the result of our analysis is always something else. To put the entire situation as simply as possible, thinking, and so philosophy, is at every step both intuitive and

analytical. This simple fact means that philosophy cannot possibly be understood as simply analytical. In order to give a reasonable account of analysis, one must give an account of something *other than* analysis. The dream of describing the world in terms of an alphabet of simple elements must be supplemented by an account of dreaming.

III

Aristotle distinguishes between a "whole" and an "all" with respect to two main features: the unity and the position of the parts.⁹ A whole is not a point, but an internally articulated or, so to speak, "well-ordered" unity. Whereas the nature of the unit is to be "a kind of origin for number,"¹⁰ it is not necessarily the case that the unity of the whole is also a sum of natural parts. For example, pleasure is an activity and a whole in the sense of that which is complete at every moment.¹¹ One might analyze the experience of pleasure, and Aristotle does this at some length. But the analysis of the experience of pleasure is not the same as the experience of pleasure. I believe that we can sharpen this formulation. Pleasure itself, as distinct from both the concept and the experience of pleasure, is a unity in the sense that, as Aristotle says of an element, "it is indivisible in its form into another form."¹² The analysis of the concept of pleasure is thus rooted in the experience, not of a concept, but of pleasure itself. Such an analysis can never capture the unity of pleasure itself as it shows itself within the continuum of our experience of that unity. On the contrary, we measure the experience, and so too the analytical construction of the concept, by the unity.

The example of pleasure is intended to suggest something about the manner of accessibility of simple elements or units of measurement. One does not have to be an existentialist to point out that life is a kind of unity of unities, none of them equivalent to a set of analytical predicates.¹³ Since analysis is an activity of living beings, in order to make sense out of analysis, we must be able to speak rationally about life. This observation provides me with my transition to the final section of this essay. I want to close by giving a brief sketch of the existential and the logical components of Plato's treatment of

Socrates' dream. My purpose is to call attention to some features of Platonic rhetoric, but with the specific intention of illustrating how this rhetoric gives us a clue toward the overcoming of our logical problems. I shall therefore be illustrating Plato's own resolution of the problem of the context of analysis. And I shall offer one or two criticisms of this resolution, or suggestions for modifying the Platonic doctrine in the light of the lessons we have learned from the subsequent history of philosophy.

The first thing to be said is that the Platonic dialogue is a day-dream of the whole. I have noted elsewhere that the remarks of the later Wittgenstein, in this respect interestingly like the epigrams and paragraphs of Nietzsche, remind us of monologues in search of a dialogue. Neither Wittgenstein nor Zarathustra is capable of dialogue. Both must reject their disciples because the context of a discursive community is for them illusory, a chaos or nothingness to be felt, not spoken. For Plato, on the contrary, the whole is *logos*. However, just as Wittgenstein's complex thought may be vulgarized by reducing it to techniques of conceptual analysis, so too with Plato: *logos* means here ratio or harmony as accessible to speech. It cannot be reduced to "logic." In other words, *logos* includes *mythos*, or the variety of ways in which humans communicate to each other via symbols that are detachable from their meanings. In still another formulation, the dream of analytical elements is also the dream of an alphabet as the unity of these elements. But how we talk about elements is not simply identical with how we talk about the alphabet. Plato suggests this distinction in the following way. In the dialogues, there are four main appearances of the example of the alphabet: these occur in the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Philebus*.¹⁴ Socrates is the main speaker in the first and last, whereas he is replaced by the Eleatic Stranger in the second and third. In the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, the Stranger introduces the example of the alphabet as an illustration of the analytical method, and in sharp distinction to mythical or pre-analytical thinking. As the Stranger observes in the *Statesman*, the function of the example of the alphabet is to illuminate the *technē* of politics, or to provide waking knowledge, not dream knowledge (278e4–11). The context

makes clear that the dream knowledge in question is the myth of the reversed cosmos, previously told by the Stranger (cf. 277a–c). Basically the same situation obtains in the *Sophist*. The example of the alphabet prepares the discussion of the communion of kinds, or the analytical resolution of problems raised by children or old men who have come late to learning (251b). This passage in turn serves to contrast the analysis of elemental relations with the doctrines of Parmenides and the other pre-Socratic thinkers, who spoke in a "popular" (or "relaxed") and "mythical" way about the number and kinds of beings (242c).

The alphabet serves the Stranger as a paradigm for sober, analytical, or waking thought. He concentrates exclusively upon the letters as elements of syllables. In the case of Socrates, the situation is more nuanced. In the *Philebus*, where the discussion soon turns from pleasure to the one and the many, Socrates introduces diaeresis or the analysis of formal structure as a gift of the gods (16c). He describes this method in language that is both mythical and analytical. The example of the alphabet, which Socrates employs to clarify his initial statement, is very soon converted into the story of Theuth, the Egyptian god who first saw the unities or letters in the infinite continuum of sound (18b). In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates speaks of a dream rather than a myth (201e), but the point is the same. To the analytical intelligence, dreams are myths or fairy-tales. In fact, Socrates refers the dream to some unnamed source; this is his usual procedure of attributing myths to gods, poets, or the ancestors. Socrates provides us with a different context of analysis than does the Stranger, a context more like that of the dialogue-form itself. I take this as a hint that those who identify Plato's "mature" position with that of the Stranger, as a tacit criticism or repudiation of Socrates, are mistaken. However this may be, we note further that, in his development of the paradigm, Socrates, exactly like the Stranger, focuses exclusively on the letters and their combination into syllables. He does not treat discursively the paradigm of the alphabet as a unity of letters. We are left to infer his attitude toward the alphabet from the dramatic or "poetic" context. Plato, whether in his Socratic or his Eleatic manifestations, accepts both the necessity of simple elements

for discursive thinking, and the impossibility of giving a discursive account of their nature. An account of the nature of simple elements would explain, not merely their simplicity as detached elements, but also their unity as elements within an alphabet. This is impossible, and the effort to engage in such an analysis leads us directly into the heart of a Hegelian or dialectical logic. Hence the language of myth (to let one term stand for a complex of procedures) must supplement the language of analysis. Aristotle's criticism of myth arises from his belief that he has resolved the problems of unity, multiplicity, and hence nonbeing, by his doctrine of predication. This Aristotelian belief is the ancestor of contemporary analytical philosophy. The difficulty I have suggested in the case of Aristotle is therefore squarely in the path of every analytical thinker. Either he remains silent about the context of analysis, in which case he dissolves into Nietzsche's chaos, or else he attempts to analyze the context of analysis, in which case he is transformed into a Hegelian. Aristotle, I might add, could defend himself against this dilemma by his doctrine of intellectual intuition. The contemporary analyst has no such doctrine.

Let us look briefly at the situation in the *Theaetetus*. This will enable us to study, in a relatively accessible manner, the *aporiai* underlying all the references to ontological alphabets in Plato. As I have been contending, these are also the *aporiai* of analytical thinking in general. The *Theaetetus* is especially interesting to us because, in it, Socrates converses exclusively with mathematicians, in pursuit of a quasi-mathematical definition of "knowledge itself" (146e), as inspired by Theaetetus' discovery of how to divide, not the infinite continuum of sound, but that of numbers. Theaetetus is unable to transfer his mathematical technique to the problem at hand. He finally remarks that he once heard someone else refer to knowledge as "true opinion together with logos" (201c-d). Socrates makes a very illuminating comparison between this definition and hearsay evidence used by skilled lawyers to obtain a conviction when there are no eye-witnesses to the crime (201a-c). As we may restate this, the stories told by gods, poets, or the ancestors provide us with the "general picture" in those decisive cases where there are

no formal structures to look at directly. In all these cases, there may be true opinion, but not technical or epistemic knowledge.

Socrates' distinction brings to mind an analogy between seeing and epistemic knowing. Hearing, as he now indicates, is like dreaming. In exchange for Theaetetus' memory or dream, Socrates will recount one that he has himself heard. We are altogether in the realm of "hearsay" (201d). Neither Socrates nor Theaetetus, themselves both characters in a Platonic dream, have dreamt the dreams they mention. It would be going too far to say that they are only tangentially involved in the proceedings, yet both have been transformed for the moment into symbols of a message from a deeper stratum of reality. Socrates "seems to have heard" people defending the doctrine of simple elements. The emphasis upon hearsay apparently disregards the visual content of dreams. But the difficulty lies precisely in recollecting this content, or in translating it into public qua scientific discourse. If the dream were merely reported, it would become public in another sense, like a Socratic myth, or a Platonic dialogue. The analogy between seeing and knowing is therefore incomplete. We also know what we hear, even in those cases where there is nothing to see: or, stated more cautiously, where there are visible forms, but invisible combinations of these forms. I want to emphasize that this metaphor is intended to work in both directions: seeing the whole depends upon hearing (or something like hearing), but hearing depends upon seeing.

The image of the dream must be connected to the previous figures in the *Theaetetus* of the wax tablet and the aviary, introduced by Socrates to facilitate the analysis of knowledge. These are the functional equivalents to Wittgenstein's fables and examples. They are the consequence, not of analysis, but of the imagination. And this means that there is a Platonic version of the doctrine that human thinking participates in the task of revealing the truth; thinking is productive as well as receptive. If dreaming produces the unity of the whole, or better, contributes to making that unity visible, then the logic we require for the analysis of that unity is, so to speak, psychoanalytical rather than mathematical. That thinking is productive

in the sense just mentioned, is obvious from the nature of the dialogue as day-dream. That it is not productive in the sense of a creation *ex nihilo* follows from the Platonic Ideas and doctrine of nature, especially of the nature (or natures) of the soul. Those who fear that the language of dreams and psychoanalysis reinstitutes the evils of "psychologism" should remember that the study of the internal structure of mathematics is not the same as the study of the soul qua mathematician.

Let this suffice as an evocation of the dream-context of the simple elements. Now I must indicate the nature of the technical *aporia* in the content of the dream. According to this dream, we can name each element as distinct or separate in itself (*auto kath' hauto*), but we can say nothing more about it, not even that the element exists or does not exist, since that would be to attach being or non-being to it (201e). We cannot even say of the element that it is "same," "each," "alone," "this," and so on (202a). Some have supposed that the problem Socrates raises here is solved by the Stranger in the *Sophist*. My view is quite different. I cannot go into all the details, but the main point is easy to state. The difficulty concerning the simple elements is exactly applicable to the doctrine of "greatest kinds" and their combinations. In order to say, and thus to think analytically, element *x* by itself, it is necessary, as Socrates observes, to combine two elements, *x* and *itself*. But this gives us the standard Platonic formula for the Idea: *auto to x*. So too in the *Sophist*: "same" is a distinct kind, as are "being," "other," "change," and "stasis," to restrict ourselves to the Stranger's examples. The analytical explanation of the meaning of the assertion "change is not stasis" requires us to postulate a communion between "change" and "same" with respect to change itself, and then between "change" and "stasis" via "other." But how, in logical or ontological space, can we (or divine intelligence) distinguish between the "sameness" of change itself, and "same" as the logically distinct form, to which "change" must be related in order to "be" itself, via a further relation to "being"? If the answer is that all these relations subsist eternally as the ground of logical discourse, then I reply that it is discursively impossible to separate these elements and their relations.

Any attempt to formulate the doctrine of the community of kinds, whether taken to be simple elements or ontological paradigms, provides us with evidence, not of that doctrine, but of another. I refer to the doctrine that elements are like letters in the alphabet, but that the alphabet is the unity of differences, or a self-differentiating whole, to be conceived on the model of genesis, or what Plato sometimes calls *erōs*. And this means, I think, that it becomes impossible to distinguish intelligence from the elements it differentiates. The "psychoanalytical" interpretation of *erōs* is, or leads to, a peculiarly Hegelian logic of being and nothingness, not as predicates, whether vacuous or otherwise, but as the disturbances constituting the inner excitation of the whole. Recall again the puzzle of the altogether not in the *Sophist*. Whatever we may say of a simple element is actually an assertion about a compound of elements. If negation is the cancellation of a predicate, but in relation to a subject defined by other predicates, then the denial of simple elements is like the cancellation of all predicates. In this case, with respect to what subject does the comprehensive cancellation occur? Surely there is no other candidate than the compound or syllable. But if the syllable has no letters, or if the letters are invisible, then the syllable itself collapses internally, or becomes a letter, and is hence itself unknowable. Socrates himself points out this consequence (205e), but since he does not distinguish between the two senses of "simple" that I noted previously, and because he makes no explicit use of dreaming or intellectual intuition here, but restricts knowing to analyzing, he cannot solve his own puzzle. The assertion of simple elements is then unintelligible, whereas the denial of simple elements amounts to the assertion of the altogether not.

Socrates criticizes the doctrine of simple or unknowable elements (202d ff.), but he never repudiates the associated definition of knowledge as right opinion together with *logos* (202c-d; cf. 201c). Instead, he says that the definition is "likely" (202d-e). As I have been arguing, this means, not that the doctrine of simple elements must be rejected, but that it cannot be explained in its own terms. One odd sign of Plato's manner of presenting the issue is that in none of the main uses of the alphabet-paradigm do we find

mention of words. The speakers either restrict themselves to letters and syllables, or proceed directly from these to statements. Words appear only as strings of syllables, not as distinct structures in the paradigm of meaning. But this vitiates the force of the paradigm, as is immediately obvious from one of Socrates' own examples. We may allow that names refer to elements, and that explanations are constructed from names. But words are not formed by combining the names of syllables. We could say that the name of the syllable formed from the letters *S* and *O* is *SO*. Hence the name "Socrates" might be woven together from the names *SO*, *CRA*, and *TES*. But the meaning of the name "Socrates" has nothing to do with the names of its syllabic constituents.

The word is the crucial mediation-point between elements and statements. If the word had no elements, then we could not understand it. But we understand it in the context of statements. Words then become "simple" elements of statements, which in turn may perhaps be called "simple" elements of *logoi* or connected accounts. There is a kind of circularity of explanation here, but, I think, an altogether necessary one. At the same time, the circle is not quite the famous "hermeneutic circle" of the Heideggerean (or Diltheyan) school. That circle arises upon the assumption that meaning is at each level discursive. The situation I describe is rooted in the non-analytical nature of the unities at each level of meaning. These levels are not established by "myths" in the sense of historical constructions. The context of analysis is always the same in its general features: to take my own example, unity qua wholeness does not alter in its nature from historical epoch to historical epoch. And yet, it cannot be explained in a purely analytical way. It points beyond analysis to a universal dimension in which formal characteristics are embedded in an unformalizable process. Plato exhibits this process in his myths, and I have called them "general pictures" which combine hearsay and direct visual (or intuitive) evidence. But the peculiar feature of these "general pictures" is that they can only be expressed in terms which vary from telling to telling. The universality of the context of analysis is accessible only to the specific language of poetry, fables, hunches, examples, or dreams. For this reason,

of course, the temptation to equate "general pictures" with transient or historical creations is very great. Nevertheless, the philosopher must find a way to resist that temptation without falling into the opposite temptation of formalism.

The problem in Plato, as I see it, is this. The dialogues provide us with materials for a general theory of the context of analysis. But the explicit treatment of thinking is always in terms of a paradigm of analysis of compounds of simple elements. This leaves us with a blurred picture, or what seem to be two discontinuous levels of human spiritual activity. Let us call these activities mathematics and poetry. What we require in addition, I suggest, is something approximating to Hegel's dialectical logic, in order to unify the two dimensions of mathematics and poetry. I say "something approximating to Hegel's dialectical logic," because that logic itself possesses the complementary defect of dissolving the natures of mathematics and poetry into a unity of excessive generality. We need to pay attention to the alphabet qua alphabet, or to "spell out" the implications of Plato's myths in such a way as to gain a more explicitly rational grip on the context of analysis than he provides. Such a grip, as I have argued in this essay, will never come from more and more intense analytical efforts. So too, those analytical philosophers who search for their origins in Plato, or try to remove the *aporiai* in his "arguments" by the tools of contemporary logic, are like those who attempt to jump over their own shadow. The fundamental *aporiai* in the dialogues are rooted in the limitations of the analytical method of thinking.

Analytical philosophers are today still dreaming one version or another of Socrates' dream. Unfortunately, unlike their paradigm, they refuse to engage in reflections toward a theory of dreaming. As my humble contribution toward such a theory, I conclude with these observations. If the alphabet is regarded exclusively as a sum of elements, then there can be no analytical distinction between the whole and the all. But if it is regarded exclusively as a self-differentiating unity, then there can be no analytical logic. I infer from this dilemma that the whole is both the same as and other than the all. Hegelian logic, far from being an eccentric fantasy of

speculation, is suggested to us by common-sense considerations of simplicity, unity, and wholeness. But the same considerations of common-sense lead us to add that even a dialectical logic depends upon the capacity to distinguish formal elements. If such distinguishing is analyzing, it is also intellectual intuition: even more, it is (to repeat) seeing in co-operation with hearsay evidence. I therefore conclude that philosophers must be lawyers and psychoanalysts as well as mathematicians and poets. This is my emendation of the program for educating philosophers as put forward with tongue in cheek by Plato in his *Republic*.

Notes

- 1 P. F. Strawson, *Subject and Predicate* (London: Methuen, 1974), pp. 21, 26 ff.
- 2 *Metaphysics* Γ. 2, 1004a9 ff., Γ. 7, 1011b23 ff.
- 3 Michael Dummett, *Frege* (London: Duckworth, 1973), p. 231.
- 4 Pierre Aubenque, *Le Problème de l'être chez Aristote* (Paris: PUF, 1962), p. 70, note 2, interprets statements like "Socrates exists" to mean "Socrates is an instance of the species-form 'man.'" He draws the conclusion opposite to the one I give in the text. As further evidence that my conclusion is actually justified by his interpretation, cf. p. 233, note 1: "il est évident que, pour Aristote, il n'y a d'essence que de ce qui est (cf. *Anal. post.* II, I, 89b34...)." Aubenque does not seem to note in this context that to be an essence of what is, is other than to be "what is," i.e. what exists.
- 5 Γ. 2, 1003b22 ff.
- 6 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Z. 17, 1041a16 ff.
- 7 Dummett, *Frege*, pp. 278 ff.
- 8 David Wiggins, "Sentence meaning, negation, and Plato's Problem of non-being," in *Plato 1: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, ed. G. Vlastos (New York: Doubleday, 1971).
- 9 *Metaphysics* Δ. 26.
- 10 *Metaphysics* Δ. 6.
- 11 *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 4.
- 12 *Metaphysics* Δ. 3, 1014a26.
- 13 Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X. 5, 1175a12: "life is a kind of *energeia*..."
- 14 For further discussion of the alphabet paradigm in Plato, cf. Gilbert Ryle, "Letters and Syllables in Plato," in *Collected Papers*, vol. 1 (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1971) and David Gallop, "Plato and the Alphabet," *Philosophical Review*, vol. 72 (1963), pp. 364–376.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Return to the Origin: Reflections on Plato and Contemporary Philosophy

I am grateful for the invitation to lecture on Plato and contemporary philosophy.¹ I have tried to choose a single topic which is both of fundamental importance and allows for a certain speculative development that seems appropriate for the present circumstances. On the other hand, I have tried to follow the wise maxim of Sherlock Holmes, the greatest English philosopher: "Data, Watson, data! You can't build bricks without straw!" My lecture falls into three parts. In the first part, I give a sketch of the enterprise designated by my title. In part two, there will be a brief discussion of Kant as the crucial mediating step between Plato and the contemporary scene. In the third and last section, I want to consider briefly some examples of the post-Kantian version of the Platonic attempt to return to the origin.

I. Plato

By "return to the origin" I mean the attempt to find the significance or validity of philosophy in the pre-philosophical situation. In our time, this situation has been given a variety of names: *In-Der-Welt-Sein*, *Lebenswelt*, *Lebensform*, ordinary experience, the linguistic horizon, and so on. Even in the case of modern science, one could say that there is a "Platonic" or pre-Socratic return to the origin, namely, to *kinēsis* (cf. *Theaetetus* 152–153). However, I shall not be speaking of "origin" in that sense. The most obvious equivalent in the Platonic dialogues to the sense of "origin" I have in mind is *doxa*. A glance at the secondary literature is enough to show that the students of Plato normally analyze the role of *doxa* in the dialogues in conjunction with that of *epistēmē*. It is normally taken for granted that the task of philosophy is to replace *doxa* as "opinion" with *epistēmē* as "true knowledge." The analysis thus proceeds upon the assumption

that the nature of *doxa* is technical or proto-technical or that the task of the analyst is to give a technical *logos* of the equally technical Platonic sense of *doxa*. I should not go so far as to say that this assumption is always wrong. Nevertheless, the terms in which it is conceived produce an initial distortion and narrowing of the nature and role of *doxa* in Plato. The problem of *doxa* becomes from the outset an issue in epistemology. The unsatisfactory character of this formulation should be evident from the fact that there is not, and could not be, "epistemology" for Plato. There is no *logos* of *epistēmē*. The main reason for this is that *logos* and so *epistēmē* both originate in *doxa*. One can give an epistemic *logos* of an *eidos* or of a *symplokē eidōn*. But to what form or structure of forms does *doxa* correspond? In another formulation: "epistemology" gives a determinate account of the conceptual operations by which knowledge is acquired, i.e. of the concept-forming powers, and so of the structure, of the intellect. But there is no such structure in Plato, and no concepts analogous to those of modern epistemology. Knowledge (*epistēmē*) is of forms or beings, not of concepts. Instead of "concepts," one may refer in a Platonic context to "*doxai*."

A formal, logical, or "conceptual" analysis of Platonic texts has its virtues. But it should be clear that such an analysis can never succeed in grasping, let alone extracting, anything like the "essence" of *doxa*, understood in its comprehensive, pre-technical, and so pre-philosophical sense. This impossibility is perhaps obscured by the fact that, in so designating *doxa* within a philosophical discussion one seems to be assigning it from the outset a technical sense. Nevertheless, the case remains as I have described it. If one can talk about *doxa* in the pretechnical sense only by using technical terms of a philosophical nature, then the "return to the origin" is impossible. And yet, at least for those who follow the Platonic route, it seems to be necessary or desirable. To continue with the sketch of the issue, I have already observed that if *doxa* has anything like an *ousia*, it cannot be an *eidos* or web of forms. The logical universe of discourse is not the same as the universe of *doxa*. That is: *doxa* has no *ousia*, no *eidos*, and hence no epistemic *logos*, because it is the cosmos or "whole" produced by the interaction of knower and known.

This formulation will appear initially suspicious, or worse, to the Plato scholar. In the *Theaetetus*, for example, Socrates refers to the unstable consequence of the interaction of perceiver and perceived as *metaxu*, an "in-between" creature of indeterminate properties.² Socrates persuades his interlocutors that no *logos* can be given of this domain of "in-betweenness." Since for Socratic epistemic analysis, "to be" is to be "something" in the sense of an *on*, *ousia*, or *eidos*, and thus the stable reference of a *logos*, it seems to follow that the *metaxu*-domain lacks being or does not exist. If this were sound, then genesis as subjectively perceived and experienced would not exist.³ It would have to be analyzed into the knower on the one hand, and eidetic elements on the other. But the abolition of the domain of perceived experience entails not merely the suppression of "subjectivity" but the unknowability of the knower as well. Even worse, it entails the suppression of the domain of consciousness, or of the cosmos as perceived, in the dual sense of sensuous and intellectual perception.

With respect to the knower: a collection of formal atoms lacks self-consciousness. And it is itself a structure or web, i.e. an intelligible order, rather than an indeterminate manifold, only to an intelligence. Similarly, to say that X shares in Y with respect to Z, is to isolate a specific formal relation from a web of forms, on the basis of the intention of the analyst. If the intention were itself a form, then there would be no self-conscious analyst, and hence no consciousness of form. The forms would not be "present" because "presence" is "presence to" and there would be no object (or subject) of the preposition "to." I suspect this means that the forms themselves could not "be" (or share in *ousia*), but I will not pursue this directly. Suffice it to say that rejection of the Greek doctrine of mind as unstructured or pure passive receptivity leads also to the doctrine of *sense* of being as constituted noetically, rather than as simply identical with a passive intuition of a separate form.

I repeat: if there is a distinction between intelligence and form, then whether or not there is a form of intelligence, intellectual activity is not itself equivalent to formal structure. There must be a way other than by appeal to quasi-mathematical forms to account for

the activity of thinking. And since intellectual activity is inseparable from, whether or not equivalent to, talking, there must be a comprehensive but nonepistemic mode of talking within which *logos* in the technical sense originates. As a matter of empirical fact, there clearly is such a mode of talking. We call it "ordinary language" or *doxa*. One way to perceive the issue I am sketching is as preparation for an examination of the consequences of the attempt to formalize ordinary or natural language. Let me emphasize that, as I am using the term, *doxa* does not mean "private opinions," "subjective impressions," "beliefs," or any other expression referring to individual consciousness as functioning within a readily accessible "common" or "objective" world. *Doxa* is, to use again the Platonic expression, the whole. I merely throw out the suggestion here, to which I shall return later, that *doxa*, or the cosmos projected by the interaction of knower and known, is Plato's version of transcendental subjectivity. Please note from the outset: this is not the same as to attribute "transcendental knowledge" in a Kantian sense to Plato. My use of the term *doxa* is meant to refer, among other things, to the absence in Plato of an *epistēmē* of *nous*, *noēsis*, or *dianoia*. In Plato, the principles of *things* (*onta*, *eidē*) are not expressions of the synthetic function of mind. On the contrary, thinking must conform to these principles. Now permit me to restate more generally my criticism of Socrates' rejection of the *metaxu*-domain in the *Theaetetus*. Not merely would there be no perceptions, fantasies, dreams, or subjective experiences, but there would be no cosmos or whole. In a certain fundamental sense, there is nothing but the *metaxu*-domain. Everything else arises by specification or abstraction, including the Platonic Ideas. This process of specification or abstraction, however, is not the same as the one embodied in the axiom of contemporary set-theory. It is closer to an insistence upon the accessibility of what Kant calls *noumena* or things-in-themselves.

Let me restate this point. Any doctrine of "being" (and so of "non-being") that proceeds exclusively in terms of formal elements and discursive copies of the relations of these elements, is incapable of even beginning to explain intelligence. It cannot therefore explain, or even mention, the comprehensive world of subjective experience,

the world as experienced by intelligence. All technical arguments to one side, there are various ways in which Plato indicates to the reader his understanding of this point. I wish to mention only the most comprehensive way: the dialogue-form itself. The peculiar feature of the Platonic dialogue is that it shows us philosophy in the act of emerging from everyday life. Those who ignore the portrait as irrelevant to its content are manifestly disregarding Plato's most explicit evidence to the contrary. They do so, I believe, because of certain technical preconceptions about the relation between *epistēmē* and *doxa* which lead them, as I mentioned above, to overlook the comprehensive problem of *doxa* as Plato himself formulated it. In the first place, the function of the dialogue-form is mirrored within the dialogue by the *ad hominem* nature of every argument, a fact obvious in itself and one which is regularly insisted upon by Socrates.⁴ The same point is evident, if not quite so obviously, in the use of myths and other rhetorical devices, such as emphasis upon the ambiguous nature of Socrates, and the question of his relation to the other main speakers when Socrates is silent or absent. The dialogues, with their varied and specific portraits of midwife, prophetess, logician, ontologist, statesman, all engaged in the various stages of the origination of philosophy, are finally an ironical monologue by Plato, and in this specific and crucial sense closer to the writings of Kierkegaard than to those of Gilbert Ryle. In the dialogues, philosophy originates in the *Lebenswelt* or natural attitude, and *in the terms of the natural attitude*. No matter how technical or abstract the discussion, it is rooted in a specific drama which is itself an image of the unity of human experience. The significance or validity of these technical discussions arises from the intentions, ends, or values of man as resident within the natural attitude, and not as transcendental phenomenologist describing the structures that constitute the *Lebenswelt*. The dialogue-form calls us back to the individual resident of the *Lebenswelt*, that is to say, to ourselves, as the agent of *doxa*. To whom else could philosophy have any meaning or value?

One could say that the Platonic characters are to some degree "ideal types." But the purpose of the ideal type is to explain something about the individual. The individual does not exist solely to

be assimilated into an ideal type. Differently put, there is something teleological about actual life, but nothing teleological about geometrical replicas of the general traits of life. The genuine individual in the Platonic cosmos, however, is neither Socrates nor any of the other characters in the dialogues, but rather Plato himself. The relation between Plato and his dialogues is, I suggest, the crucial question for the reader who reflects upon the origin and nature of philosophy. If I may speak with candor, the view that one can understand philosophy without understanding the nature of the philosopher is absurd in itself and altogether un-Platonic. It is worth contrasting this point in Plato with the parallel situation in Husserl, since there are both similarities and differences. Husserl emphasizes the need to validate philosophy as the comprehensive sense of human existence by a return to its origin in the *Lebenswelt*. However, understood as the object or theme of phenomenological analysis, the relation between the phenomenologist and the *Lebenswelt* is explicit and technically defined. Suffice it to say that, *qua* philosopher, the phenomenologist does not return to the *Lebenswelt* *qua* prephilosophical resident. But the relation between Plato and his dialogues is radically more ambiguous. Are the dialogues games, the pastimes of old men? Are they pedagogical mimes? Or are they merely advertisements for the Academy? If the last, surely they must be the most peculiar advertisements ever published, and that in itself tells us a good bit about Plato.

It is safe to say that, even in the explicit statements of the *Letters*, Plato tells us nothing definitive about the nature of his dialogues. In that specific sense, his monologue is a dialogue between speech and silence. Plato's speech about the whole is an image of silence, in a way similar to Fichte's late doctrine of genesis as an image of the Absolute. Plato's own poetic activity generates the image of the whole. Without that poetic activity, there would be no image, but consequently, no whole. The whole is accessible to man only in his thinking it. This is not the same as to say that man "makes" beings, natures, or Ideas. But it is to say that, at the least, he shares in the making of the cosmos or whole, the pre-philosophical horizon of the everyday experience, within which beings, natures, or Ideas become

visible, and to which they owe their significance. I repeat: Ideas are not concepts. Knowledge of Ideas (if there is any) is not derived from a synthetic activity of the intellect which may be formulated systematically on the basis of principles and rules. But neither are Ideas the whole. The whole results from our thinking together Ideas, intellect or soul, the receptacle, and images or phenomena. One could call this "thinking together" a synthesis. And this is what I mean by *doxa* or the Platonic version of transcendental subjectivity. It is, again, not an "opinion" to be replaced by *epistēmē*, not a private fantasy, not the belief of this or that individual, but the world as unity of knower and known, which always presents itself directly to *me*, or to each individual, as a resident within that world, even when I think reflexively about my relation to that world. There is no epistemic *logos* of the home of epistemic *logos*. Plato's silence about his relation to the world underlines what one could call the pictorial aspect of the dialogues. The philosopher must of course describe or analyze the world. But he must see it in some pre-analytical way, in order to know *what* and *how* to analyze. This act of vision is imagic or poetic. The poetic production of the whole is the activity of transcendental subjectivity, which functions always in and as the finite thinker, that is, the resident within the world so produced. The dialogues, as the image of the whole, are then not epistemic *logos* but *doxa*. There is no Idea or structure of Ideas corresponding to this world. In one last formulation: the world of comprehensive human experience is not the world of Ideas, but rather the world of images. Speaking metaphorically, one might even suggest that Plato's image of the whole is indeed the "Idea" of the whole. The whole, however, as distinct from the all or sum of parts, is an "Idea" with which images rather than epistemic *logoi* accord. And this is why Plato wrote dialogues.

II. Kant

I should now like to consider, in an extremely concise way, three main points of the Kantian teaching, in order to sketch his relation to Plato. Since my intention is merely to introduce the Kantian role as mediator between Plato and the twentieth century, I shall suggest that Kant's three *Critiques* may be represented here by three

words: thesis, duty, and purposiveness. In the first case, the synthetic activity of the transcendental ego is intended to exclude the noetic intuition of structured unities or Platonic Ideas, and thus to replace these Ideas by the categories and objects of understanding. As Kant puts it most simply, there is no analysis without a prior synthesis.⁵ If Ideas are understood as originals of generated copies (= *phenomena*), there is in this case no return to the origin (= *noumena*). The logical relations of the phenomenal objects of understanding are "original" in the sense that they are constituted by the synthetic activity of the transcendental ego. But they are not intuitions of eternal archetypes. Instead, they are the structures engaged by the activity of thinking in a being that lacks intellectual intuition. We have no way of knowing whether these structures correspond to analogous forms in the originals understood as things in themselves. Even if we press the analogy between the categories of *Verstand* and the specifically logical Ideas of Plato, the resultant structure remains empty of content.

One can also express the relation between Plato and Kant as follows. In Kant, the world of genesis is the consequence of the synthetic activity of transcendental subjectivity. But this is the world of *epistēmē* not of *doxa*, and precisely because of the nature of synthesis. Differently stated, the world of genesis, even though it is "phenomenal," is not an image. It arises by virtue of an interaction between perceiver and *Empfindungen*, but the result is a determinate structure describable by mathematics and the natural sciences. If there is any counterpart in Kant to what I have called *doxa* in Plato, it can only be in the domain of poetry, or else dialectic, or (to put it briefly) unscientific illusion. The idea of the sublime gives us the basis for a poetic account of the whole, but not for a cognitive one. As for dialectic, Kant interprets Platonic Ideas as regulative Ideals of the unconditioned, or the totality of conditions valid within *Verstand*. These Ideals are the concepts or rules of *Vernunft* which serve to unify, and thus to regulate, *Verstand*. A constitutive or epistemic use of the Ideals, i.e., an effort to know totality discursively, produces the dialectical antinomies rather than genuine knowledge. An "opinion" about the whole is thus not the "opening of the horizon" within which *Verstand* functions, but illusion. One cannot

extirpate the inclination to dialectic, but it can always be regulated or limited in its power to confuse us by the exercise of critical rationalism. The original (= noumenal) world is one of Ideals, not of Ideas. Phenomena are not images of Ideals, but (together with the structure furnished by transcendental subjectivity) themselves an original world. This raises the problem of how to reconcile the two worlds, or of alienation. But it does not reduce the world of appearances to the status of an illusion, nor does it make that world an *image* of some other world. Kant, of course, insists that there is just one world, looked at in two different ways. Whether we speak of one world or two, the point about images remains the same.

In Plato, the world of *doxa* is not an illusion. Yet it does exhibit "dialectical" properties which arise from the absence of a definite logico-mathematical structure for such a world as a whole. We may call it an image-world in these two senses. First, an act of imagination is necessary to constitute it. Second, since there is no *logos* of such a world, since the constituting activity of the transcendental subjectivity is not "universal" in the logico-mathematical sense of the term, but rather in the poetical sense, the poetic universal is always actualized in a specific form: i.e., in an image. The world of *doxa*, even as the whole, is a dialectical process of specific and often contradictory images, exactly like the Platonic dialogues. To be sure, one may turn away from this dialectical world, or more accurately, I may turn away from my image of this world to the world of the Ideas. Eventually, however, I must return to the dialectical world of *doxa*, if only to see what the Ideas ostensibly explain. When one notices that the Ideas cannot explain the whole, and more specifically, human existence (which includes scientific and logical activity), one begins to look for other ways in which to provide a general account of *doxa* than the epistemic *logos*.

In the case of duty, the second of our three characterizing terms, the non-Platonic nature of Kant's teaching seems clear enough. This teaching arises to a decisive degree in opposition to the classical doctrine of *eudaimonia* or concern with one's own happiness. Kant starts from the fact of the moral law (4, 34, 37, 106).⁶ Everyone knows his duty, or is governed in his feelings (if not in his acts)

by conscience (43 f., 84–87, 99). Duty has two main characteristics. First, it is expressed in moral laws, understood as manifestations of the categorical imperative (38). Second, in order to be obedient, one must possess an autonomous will, the sole principle of all moral laws (39). The fact of the moral law, or the accommodation of the principle of morality to imperfectly rational beings who require commands, is then the basis for the deduction of the faculty of autonomy or freedom, the principle or origin of moral laws (55 f.). The universality of the law expresses its independence from differences of taste; the autonomy of the will expresses our actual capacity to act responsibly, independently of objects or external circumstances. One could therefore say that the free man respects the moral law (87, 92) because he recognizes in it the “image” (my word) of his residency within a supersensuous kingdom of ends, above and beyond his residency in the world of corporeal necessity (102, 113⁷). Here, unlike the case with respect to knowledge, it seems inevitable to refer to two worlds rather than to one world with two aspects. In any event, virtue is the supreme but not the complete good; it becomes this only with the acquisition of happiness (127 f.). And happiness in turn rests upon the possibility of the connection between morality and my reward, as guaranteed by God to members of the kingdom of ends or rational beings (137, 140–145). I must, of course, obey the moral law from duty, not from a hope for eternal reward (149, 180). From this standpoint, it is better that we do not have knowledge of God and immortality, since then, if we did, hope or fear would almost certainly triumph over duty (168). Nevertheless, my duty to the moral law requires me to make the *summum bonum* the object of my will. I have a duty to believe in God and immortality (164) as the certification of the harmony between nature and the will, of the possibility of my infinite progress toward holiness, of the effectivity of my moral freedom (135, 140 f., 143).

To speak of the moral law as the “image” of the *summum bonum*, is not to assign it an illusory or even qualified status. I use the term only to underline Kant’s fundamental contention that, in the domain of morality, we have access to the “original” world of man as a thing in himself. As L. W. Beck puts it, the *summum bonum* is “a dialectical

Ideal of reason.... It is important for the architectonic purpose of reason in uniting under one Idea the two legislations of reason, the theoretical and the practical....”⁸ Whereas it would be going too far to say that the significance of the phenomenal world as the object of science is self-contained, the fact remains that the necessary reference to the other domain of reason, in the exercise of *Verstand*, directs us, not to an original object of discursive thinking, but to the teleological dimension within which morality and reflecting judgment unite. If, then, we shift our attention from such un-Platonic specifics as conscience and the moral law, to the possible connection between duty and the *summum bonum*, a comparison between Kant and Plato is legitimate. One should remember here Kant’s defense in the *First Critique* of Platonism in the domain of “principles of morality, legislation, and religion” (B375), and his reference to Platonic Ideas as telic archetypes (B374). The Platonic philosopher, one may say, has the duty to regard the world as good, in the two senses of intelligible and governed by a just deity.⁹ In other words, the Idea of the good is the indemonstrable “Ideal of reason” which serves to unite the theoretical and practical. I note in passing that an Ideal of reason in this sense is not a “value judgment” or an anthropomorphic perspective, but the necessary condition of a transcendental reflection on the origins of the fact of order and intelligibility. The great difference between Kant and Plato lies in two other points. For Plato, the “practical” goodness of the cosmos is differently actualized for philosophers and non-philosophers. Second, the goodness of the universe is for Kant always a matter of law, whereas for Plato, there are no laws, but there is eidetic analysis or *epistēmē* in the theoretical thinking of nature or the whole.

In the *Republic*, Socrates distinguishes between philosophical and vulgar virtue.¹⁰ Vulgar virtue is, as it were, Socrates’ finally pejorative version of what Aristotle rehabilitates as practical virtue. There is good reason to suppose that philosophical virtue is equivalent to *epistēmē* or dialectic *qua* analysis of forms. Occasionally, to be sure, Socrates associates *epistēmē* with a non-epistemic form of philosophical virtue.¹¹ In the main, however, one finds in the dialogues the equation of, or intimate connection between, philosophy and

wisdom on the one hand, and *epistēmē* and *technē* on the other.¹² In the *Sophist*, the Eleatic Stranger suggests that dialectic (= *diaeresis*) is the *epistēmē* of the free man, namely, the man who philosophizes "purely and justly" (253c-e). The Stranger's own account of *diaeresis* (cf. 227a-d) makes it at best unclear why purity and justice are intrinsic to the free man's *epistēmē*. It seems, so to speak, that the unity of theoretical and practical excellence is a hypothesis or consequence of one's belief in the regulative Ideal. The inadequacy of this is evident as soon as we consider the difference between dialectic *qua* formal analysis, and practical or purposive deliberation. In thinking about this difference it is helpful to refer to the subsequent conversation led by the Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman*. The discussion here is especially pertinent to a comparison between Plato and Kant. The Stranger connects epistemic or technical knowledge of politics with goodness (296d-297b), but in the midst of a distinction between "judgment" (*phronēsis*) and law. The genuine statesman is the man who rules, not by law, but by knowledge (293a-c) or judgment (294a-c). The Stranger then engages in a criticism of laws which is unparalleled in Plato. He compares *nomos* to a stubborn and ignorant man who cannot accept anything new (294b-c). The point is extended to the arts and sciences as well as to political behavior, because the discovery of the ends of the arts and sciences, and so their uses, is itself a matter of *phronēsis* rather than an application of "rule-governed thinking" or *nomos* (297d-300e).

The odd conclusion is this: the ostensible *technē* of politics is not intrinsically a *technē* at all, but the application of judgment in a sense virtually identical with pre-philosophical common sense. Since a city governed by judgment or intelligence is for practical reasons impossible, or as Kant observes, since man is imperfectly rational and thus requires to be commanded, the actual statesman must proceed by the use of laws, or through the imitation of *technē*. But this leads inevitably to bad consequences, since the rule of law makes it impossible for the best men to govern. The rule of law is thus an imitation, i.e., an image, of the truth (300b-d). And the truth is interpreted in terms of the "natural attitude" or *Lebenswelt*. The Stranger, of course, is not suggesting that *technai* like geometry or arithmetic

must be subordinate to *phronēsis* in their technical function. Instead, he is arguing that all *technai* draw their significance and purpose from the comprehensive human everyday life which, for Plato, is political. Political truth, "*epistēmē* together with intelligence" (297b), is thus compared by the Stranger to rhetoric. The whole is like the city in being subject to dialectic, with that term understood in a sense close to the philosophical rhetoric described in the *Phaedrus* (269-272).

The similarity between statesmanship, the royal art of weaving together all sciences and decisions into a common web (*Statesman* 305e), and rhetoric, is rooted precisely in the difference between *logos* and *doxa*. The *technē* of "measurement" appropriate to doxic decision-making is that which determines the fitting, the right time, and the right way (284d-e), which the Stranger carefully distinguishes from mathematical measurement. If we take together the discussion of philosopher-kings in the *Republic* and of the royal art of politics in the *Statesman*, the result for our purposes may be paraphrased as follows. The comprehensive philosophical activity of dialectic cannot be merely the formal division and collection of kinds. The "pure and just" exercise of dialectic depends upon the philosopher's obedience to the doctrine that, as the Stranger puts it in the *Sophist* (248e), "that which altogether is" has a mind and a soul, is august and holy, or in short, is good. The goodness of the universe, however, cannot be defined or expressed in terms of laws and rules. These latter belong to vulgar virtue, not because philosophical virtue is equivalent to mathematical analysis, but because it requires practical intelligence, *phronēsis*, or the capacity to measure the fitting in the comprehensive and pervasive aspects of human life, where there are no logico-mathematical forms or their analogues. To put the point in one last way: there is no *logos* of the Idea or specific nature of the human soul (as distinguished from the *logos* of the deathless change of "soul altogether": *Phaedrus* 245c-246d), but only a likeness or image (*Phaedrus* 246a). This is why, in Socrates' great myth of the soul, there is no reference to mathematics, whereas prophecy and divine madness play central roles. And once again, in the post-mythical reference to *diaeresis* in the *Phaedrus*,

division and collection of kinds is associated with philosophical rhetoric (260–272). One must know the kinds or forms as part of one's qualification for persuading human souls. But the capacity to persuade is the same as, or an immediate consequence of, our awareness of the whole. And this is not dialectic *qua diaeresis*, but rather knowledge of the fitting, the ends or purposes.

For Kant, epistemic understanding is the capacity to make judgments in the sense of acquiring knowledge through concepts.¹³ This is the capacity of rules.¹⁴ In this capacity, we possess the ability to subsume individuals under the appropriate rule. In other words, there is a difference between rule-formation and rule-application. This leaves room for the distinction, developed in the *Third Critique* (15 ff.),¹⁵ between reflecting and determining judgment. In the latter case, the universal is given by the understanding as a rule, principle, or law. When the particular alone is given, for which the universal must be found, the judgment is merely reflecting. Reflecting judgment does not determine the object either sensuously or logically (87). Its function is to classify the existing object under the appropriate rule, principle, or law. The capacity to do this is rooted in the assumption of the purposiveness of nature, namely, that the forms of objects are suited to classification under a unified system of rules, principles, or laws. Stated very generally: the conformity of nature to our intelligence raises the assumption that nature has been designed by an intelligence. Judgment is possible if nature is purposive, that is, law-like and intelligent. This corresponds in a very general way with the implication of the Eleatic Stranger's characterization of the royal political art as "*epistēmē* together with intelligence." The law-like character of the universe is an *image* of purposiveness and is not identical with it. Nature is unified by being thought as suitable to, or fit for, *Verstand*, the capacity of knowledge, and so of rules, laws, and principles (20). To say this is not to prescribe a law for nature, nor to learn one from observing nature (23). It is rather to supply a hypothesis that allows us to pursue the enterprise of acquiring knowledge about nature. This enterprise, the motivation for which does not seem to me to be adequately discussed by Kant, is in any case a fact of human nature, and a fact which endures forever.

We move toward the unity that is, so to speak, our comprehensive regulative Ideal. But can never achieve it in knowledge.

Whereas knowledge *per se*, like morality (113), is rule-governed in a determining way, reflection upon purposiveness proceeds by analogy with causal or analytical thinking (222). The concept of a natural end is regulative for reflecting judgment, not constitutive (239). Reflecting judgment is critical: it refers to the subjective conditions for thinking the concept, with no reference to the nature of the object (260). Reflecting, in its general form as teleological judgment, thus leads us beyond the analysis of the rules, laws, and principles by which the transcendental ego functions in its epistemic and moral capacities, to the regulative hypothesis of the unity of the whole as the creation of a divine and benevolent intelligence. This hypothesis is the condition for the possibility of rules, but is not itself a rule. On the other hand, it is the hypothesis of a divine ruler who indeed exercises his authority rationally, i.e., through rules, laws, and principles. In the present context, the net result of Kant's extraordinarily complex doctrine is as follows. The whole is assumed to be rule-governed, even though, in the crucial case, man cannot act in a rule-governed manner. The non-epistemic or "regulative" status of purposiveness, which seems to be similar to the non-epistemic nature of the Platonic *doxa* of the whole, is in fact an image of an epistemically constituted whole. This can also be expressed as follows: the ideal philosopher assigns tasks to the technicians of reason (the mathematician, natural scientist, and logician). However, since he does not actually exist, we turn to the idea of his legislation "to be found in that reason with which every human being is endowed."¹⁶ But this is morality, not Platonic *phronēsis* or *doxa*. No opinions are permissible in morality or in mathematics.¹⁷ We either know, or are ignorant, in these two spheres, since they lie within the domain of rules, principles, or maxims.

I can now state the conclusion of the second part of this paper. Kant directs us toward the origin primarily in his doctrine of purposiveness, but in such a way as to prepare, no doubt contrary to his intentions, Fichte on the one hand and the epistemic analysis of ends and intentions on the other. I put aside the development to and

from Fichte, since to consider it would be to enter into a different conception of the return to the origin than I am discussing here. In the second case, the Kantian "rational deity" who has designed the whole as a rule-governed unity is replaced by the human logician who designs a governed cosmos, acting upon the hypothesis that rational activity is possible only if the agent imposes his ends or intentions onto chaotic nature, which is unknowable in itself. One sees here the point of contact between post-Kantian thinkers like Nietzsche and various schools of logical analysis that dominate our own time and place. However, the logician normally goes beyond Nietzsche in the attempt to exercise the divine prerogative of analyzing those ends and intentions, that is, of submitting them to rules.

In the case of man, this is a circular or self-vitiating procedure. It leads either to an infinite regress of rules,¹⁸ or to an arbitrary set of stipulations, which may be contradicted by some other stipulator, and so generates an unending sequence of stipulative worlds or "universes of discourse." Second and more important here, it leads to the destruction of the distinction between intellectual activity and formal structure. Third and equally important, it makes impossible the rational apprehension of values characteristic of the *Lebenswelt* as lived, and so as illuminated by natural ends accessible to residents within the *Lebenswelt*. But this means that the return to the origin is destroyed or concealed even as we attempt to enact it. And thus philosophy, in attempting to validate itself, excludes all possibility of pronouncing rationally, in a non-arbitrary or non-circular way, upon its own value. In sum: according to Plato, the sense and validity of the Ideas is accessible in and to *doxa*. For Kant, the Ideas function as regulative Ideals of the totality of the unconditioned; the "belief" in the accessibility of their sense and validity to *Verstand* = *dianoia* is the cause of dialectic. However, the sense and validity of transcendental concepts is indeed accessible to discursive thinking, and constitutes a science of rules for rational thinking. This is the basis for Fregean and Wittgensteinian doctrines of rule-governed concept-formation. The Platonic Ideas are replaced, first by Kantian concepts or rules, and then by the concepts of mathematical logic, set theory, or their images in what is ostensibly "ordinary language."

III. Husserl, Heidegger, Wittgenstein

Husserl

In the last part of this discussion, I should like to consider three contemporary (and in a decisive sense post-Kantian) versions of the return to the origin. The first of this triad is Husserl. In my discussion of Plato, I distinguished two main aspects of his teaching: the analysis of formal structure, or *epistēmē*, and dialectical reflection on the whole understood as *doxa*. At first glance, there is a certain resemblance between these two aspects and the two Husserlian enterprises of eidetic analysis and the description of the *Lebenswelt*. Husserl's forms or essences correspond to every aspect of conscious experience (*Ideen* I, 75, 182). They are intuited by *noēsis* or an immediate *Wesenserschauung* that is an immediate, presuppositionless, originary beginning (*Ideen* I, 40, 44, 52) marked by apodictic evidence (*Cartesian Med.*, 56–58). This "Platonic" search for the originary evident first principles (*Form. u. tranz. Logik*, 3–4) leads, via the methodological steps of *epoché* and reductions, to a world of pure meanings (*CM*, 74), that is, to forms, formal structures, and the regional or generic structures, the "universal world structures" (*Ideen* I, 30 ff., 38, 390); and also to the analysis of consciousness itself: in general, to the forms of *cogito* and *cogitatum*, or *noēsis* and *noēma*, to the comprehensive articulation of the differentiated unity of the ego and object poles of transcendental subjectivity.

The goal is a universal *logos* of all conceivable being (*CM* 181). However, the joint analysis of ego and object, together with the function of intentionality and internal time-consciousness, in sum, of *Geist*, leads us back to the final, and thus originating, source of the meanings constituted by consciousness: the *Umwelt* (*Ideen* II, par. 64, esp. p. 297). In other words, the sense of every being in my world arises out of the constitutive syntheses of my intentional life as transcendental subject (*CM* 123). But the comprehensive problem is the constitution of the world as the ultimate horizon of my life (*Ideen* I, 399–402). This is the problem of the *Lebenswelt*, the universal horizon of every technical or scientific study, the origin of all ends and presupposed by them all (*Krisis* 459–462), the domain of original evidence (*ibid.*, 130) and so the origination of science and

philosophy (*ibid.*, 131). And "this life world is nothing other than the world of...*doxa*" (*ibid.*, 465). Whereas Husserl also emphasizes the radical importance of the self-constituting of the ego, it remains true that, according to him, the ego cannot be an object of study by itself, apart from its experiences (*Ideen I*, 195). One must assume that self-constitution is also world-constitution, and that "egology" (*CM*, 12) must be not merely supplemented by, but brought back to the *Lebenswelt* as the source of original evidence and validity for all human activities (cf. *Ideen I*, 402).

Even from this thumb-nail sketch, it should be clear that, within the manifest resemblances between Plato and Husserl, there are decisive differences. I mention those which are outstanding. First, Husserl's "Ideas" are not Platonic Ideas, as he himself emphasizes. They are not timeless transcendent realities (*CM* 104), but transcendental possibilities, constituted within the internal time-consciousness of the transcendental subjectivity. Or as Husserl also puts it, they are the subjects of true propositions (*Ideen I*, 48 ff.). Second, except within the formal sense of position in a structure, or level of generality, Husserl's essences have no hierarchical rank. They are all, so to speak, equal before the eyes of the phenomenologist, who makes no value-judgments, which are ingredient within the bracketed *Seinsgeltung* of the world, and present within the phenomenological analysis only as entities to be described (*CM*, 59–60). Husserl emphasizes repeatedly that phenomenology is a purely descriptive science (e.g. *Ideen I* 141 f., 171–3, 224; *CM*, 73–4).¹⁹ Although the terminology is not altogether satisfactory, one may say that Plato's Ideas are like ordinal as well as like cardinal numbers. To view or intuit them is to intuit their rank or value as well as their formal structure. Husserl's emphasis upon the non-deductive because purely descriptive character of phenomenology should not conceal from us that his never-abandoned ideal is "objectivity" in the pure sense of the mathematical sciences. This is obvious, among other ways, in his acceptance of the Cartesian goal of the unity of an absolutely rational and universal science, namely, phenomenology as universal *logos* (*CM*, 48). The one universal *logos* means, of course, the ideal of the total replacement of *doxa* by *epistēmē*.

Two difficulties arise with respect to the ideal of the universal elimination of *doxa*. The first concerns scientific knowledge or a *logos* of the ego. In the case of Plato, as we have already seen, this is explicitly ruled out. In the case of Husserl, it is immediately transformed from the question of the concrete individual ego, or as he is now called, the historical individual in the fullness of his existence, to the question of transcendental egology. To anticipate a bit, Heidegger's tacit criticism of Husserl on this point in *Sein und Zeit* is in a way quite Platonic. There is no *logos* of the existing individual; yet he is the *punctum inconcussum* of philosophy. After all, it is not the Ideas that philosophize, but men. Strangely enough, Heidegger develops a quasi-eidetic doctrine of existential structures in his effort to explain existence, a doctrine which in my opinion rubs against the grain of his own account of temporality or historicity. However, let me stay with Husserl. The self-constituting of transcendental subjectivity crystallizes in a curiously Fichtean manner around the two immanent-temporal poles of ego and object. Husserl's transcendental subjectivity is then from the outset a unity-within-difference of temporalized formal structures. In Plato, on the other hand, it is *doxa*, or the whole, which I have suggested we may compare to transcendental subjectivity. The world "constitutes" itself (if that is the right term) as *my* world, although, as the dialogues indicate, "I" myself am constituted as an individual within the *polis*. The *polis* is thus an image of the whole, namely, of the originative source of (among other things) formal structures. The world is the comprehensive horizon of sense and validity, or in short, something very much like Husserl's *Lebenswelt*. I as an individual (political rather than historical), the immediate reference of the Delphic oracle's injunction to "know thyself," represented within the dialogues most importantly by Socrates,²⁰ remain present and operative as a resident within the *Lebenswelt*, even while, in my persona as Platonic "phenomenologist," I run the risk of forgetting myself, of dying to this world, or disappearing into the activity of noetic *Wesensschau*. The essence of the *Wesensschau* is to be found within the pre-philosophical or doxic whole. Husserl's teaching seems initially to say much the same thing. But there is a

crucial difference: the transformation of the *Lebenswelt* or *doxa* into the object of phenomenological descriptive analysis.

The doxic world is the basis upon which science builds its structure. Therefore, its scientific value is higher than the objective-logical sciences (*Krisis* 127, 465).²¹ The *Lebenswelt* is not a sum of parts (29), the matrix or womb rather than the issue of analysis. Within this world, transcendental subjectivity is not aware of itself as constituting that world (179). In other words, the resident in the *Lebenswelt* is not addressing himself to that world as does the phenomenologist to the task of intentional analysis. To live is not to analyze. Analysis is then departure, and in this sense, quite close to what Socrates calls "dying" to this world, or to what Husserl calls the continuum of meaning and ontic validity (153). I quote: "The *epoché*, in that it gave us the attitude (*Einstellung*) above the subject-object correlation pertaining to the world, and thereby the attitude of the transcendental subject-object correlation, carries us thus far, self-contemplatively to discern that the world which is for us, which is our world in this and this way (*nach Sosein und Sein*), draws the meaning of its being altogether from our intentional life, in an a priori typic of achievements (*Leistungen*) which can be pointed out, pointed out but not constructed in argument or invented in a mythical thinking" (184). The world is disclosed by a disinterested "pointing out" which is, to repeat my previous expression, at once a departure from the origin. It seems to me that the difference between Plato and Husserl is here extremely clear. The Husserlian enterprise is much more narrowly conceived than is the Platonic. Husserl is a son of the scientific Enlightenment, which is itself motivated by one aspect of the Platonic teaching, and is in contradiction with the other. Husserl's effort to encompass the whole phenomenologically leads it to change its nature, or to become something less than the whole in the Platonic sense. And therefore, the phenomenologist seems to discover his own origins in such a way as to render them forever inaccessible.

The non-scientific nature of life within the *Lebenswelt* makes it impossible for the phenomenologist to provide a primordially rational justification of phenomenology. A universal *logos* is impossible.²²

We may apply to Husserl a criticism he levels against Kant. In Kant, inner sense is temporalized or phenomenal. But transcendental concepts are formed within inner experience. It is therefore necessary to acquire apodictic certainty about inner experience as the ground of scientific objectivity. This would amount to the derivation of the sense and validity of transcendental concepts from an apodictically purified *doxa* (116 f.), or science of the *Lebenswelt*, which Kant does not and cannot supply. However, according to Husserl, the world as a result of the transcendental *epoché* and reduction, the correlate of world-consciousness, is present within my consciousness as the "object" of the phenomenological science of subjectivity. "I stand beyond the world," which is now a phenomenon for me (154f.). I study it instead of acting within it. But whence comes the motivation, the validity and sense of the transcendental or of phenomenology as science of the world? Surely, it can come only from *within* the *Lebenswelt*. Since the scientific treatment of the *Lebenswelt* "neutralizes" ends and values within the world, or is exercised by the "disinterested observer" who does not carry out praxis as an end *in* the world, there seems to be no scientific justification of science itself (180, 242).

In my opinion, Husserl is therefore unjustified when he refers to the realization of the human *telos* through philosophy (15). I do not deny the thought, but only that it can be validated in a Husserlian sense. Whereas the sentiment is Platonic in spirit, it is articulated within the horizon of the Enlightenment, and still more specifically in the Neo-Kantian spirit of faith in the humanitarian implications of scientific rationalism. Let us say that Husserlian phenomenology has no doctrine of *erōs*. One might therefore suppose that Heidegger's analysis of *Dasein* within the everyday world as a pre-theoretical or primordial being defined by *Sorge* is an effort to return to the origin of man in the Platonic sense as an erotic being within the cosmos, in a way that Husserl's evocation of the *Lebenswelt* is not.

Heidegger

To be sure, Heidegger employs in *Sein und Zeit* what he defines as the phenomenological method, and his analysis of existential

structures seems to be analogous to the Husserlian explication of the general structures of the *Lebenswelt*. But the Heideggerean analyses all emerge from the central effort to answer the Delphic or Socratic question: Who am I? And the "I" is defined, not as the ego-pole of absolute subjectivity, but as "being there" or as existing temporally within a world of relations whose significances arise from the specific cares of the individual in his everyday deeds and speeches. However, it is precisely at the point of their apparent convergence, just as in the case of Husserl, that we see most clearly the difference between Plato and Heidegger. I shall not dwell on the "post-Christian" flavor of Heidegger's existential analysis, since one might reply that the Platonic portrait of man is "pagan" or equally conditioned by its historical epoch. Let me try to state some more fundamental differences in the two approaches toward the same goal. As I have already noted, Heidegger presents us in *Sein und Zeit* with a "scientific" or "ontological" analysis of everyday existence, whereas Plato portrays it through drama, thereby capturing an image of immediacy to the wholeness of life. This leads to a flattening or neutralizing in Heidegger's account which is curiously like the mathematical ontology he opposes. The central example here is Heidegger's insistence that *Uneigentlichkeit* does not possess a lower *Seinsgrade* than *Eigentlichkeit*.²³ In Platonic language, the existential analysis makes no distinction between the noble and the base. One should compare here a passage in the *Sophist* referred to previously (227a ff.). The Eleatic Stranger explains to young Theaetetus that the *technē* of *diaeresis* is concerned exclusively with formal relations "for the sake of intelligence." It therefore honors equally all the arts, and does not regard the general's art as more august (*semmōteron*) than that of the louse-catcher. One should not therefore be surprised to see that *diaeresis* fails altogether to define the Sophist, and is silently abandoned by the Stranger for other devices, including references to purity and justice. Heidegger's method also fails to capture the living nutrient of human existence: *phronēsis*. Precisely as returning phenomenologically or ontologically to the origin, Heidegger cannot distinguish, as we do in everyday life, between a good and bad man (cf. 283, 291). But neither can he judge the human merits of a

general and louse-catcher, to say nothing of a philosopher and a Sophist.

Still more fundamentally, the existential structures of everyday life are all derived from *Dasein's* understanding of itself out of its own factual existence, in terms defined primarily as possibility, temporality, or historicity (e.g. 12, 20, 38, 42, 234, 326 ff., 371, 374 ff.). Like Husserl, Heidegger places possibility higher than actuality. Possibility is ontological, but also transcendently temporal. Heidegger goes one step farther than Husserl, however. He arbitrarily excludes from the primordial understanding of *Dasein* all references to eternity. In so doing, he lays himself open to the same dilemma that marks Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return. Either the structure of historicity is eternal or it is temporal. In the first case, the doctrine contradicts itself; in the second, it cannot even be stated. The *Seinsfrage* cannot even be posed because Being is "present" in and through temporality. But, in Heidegger's analysis, the present, as a structural moment of temporal existence, is virtually absent. The entire existential analysis purports to explain the presence or *parousia* of Being, or of *Sein* within *Dasein*, i.e. human everyday existence. But the Heideggerean *Augenblick* is simply a "decision-point" with respect to past and future (338–346). As *schon-sich-selbst-vorweg*, *Dasein* cannot be said to dwell within a stable present (315). Whereas Plato stabilizes man's temporality within a present defined as the presence of *ousia*, Heidegger defines human temporality as an *Erstreckung* or "stretching out" of possibilities between birth and death. As one could put it, Heidegger's *Erstreckung* is the daimonic *erōs*, but without a divine *telos*. The excitation of his "stretching out" is called *Geschehen*, the basis for the interpretation of *Dasein's* existence as *Geschichtlichkeit* (374 ff.). *Dasein* is historical because "it is temporal in the ground of its being" (376), and this temporality is *my* time. I note here an ambiguity in Heidegger's shift from the "I" to the "one" (*das Man*). Heidegger does not ask "what is man?" but *who* he is (42). However, since existence is mine, the answer to this question must be "I." Heidegger's objection to the reification intrinsic to subject-object terminology fails to meet the point (46). To say that I understand myself in terms of others is to introduce a

doctrine of intersubjectivity (the modern version of Plato's doctrine of political life). It does not justify generalizing the "I" into the anonymous "one," a procedure which smacks of mathematical logic, and so, obliquely, of a different aspect of the Platonism against which Heidegger is rebelling.

I suspect that the "one" gives a pseudo-stability or objectivity to the radical transience of the "I" as entailed by Heidegger's interpretation of *Jemeinigkeit*. But I cannot pursue this now. Suffice it to say that Heidegger does not explain the flavor of the question "Who is man?," let alone approach answering it. I am man: and this is why Plato wrote dialogues. In Husserl, the living individual of the *Lebenswelt* is dissolved into the internal time-consciousness of absolute subjectivity. In Heidegger, *das Man*, the resident of, and center of significative references defining the world of daily existence, is already a disguised version of the "I," and a version which is dissolved into past and future dimensions of its possibility. There is no genuine actualization of the possibility of *das Man*. Heidegger's everyday man attempts to pull himself up out of *das Nichts* into the light of the sun. No wonder he is burdened by *Angst*. In sum: Heidegger, like Husserl, comes very close to the Platonic attempt to justify philosophy by a return to its origin in the everyday world of *doxa*. But Heidegger's analysis of *doxa* is not adequate to the phenomena.

Now one could deny the possibility of a return to the origin, whether by way of a Hegelian criticism of immediate experience or in some other manner. But Heidegger does not follow this route. Even his later doctrine of the concealment of Being requires the early "destruction" of the history of philosophy as metaphysics, in order to return to the origin as concealed. Heidegger's "language therapy" is rooted in a perception of healthy or decent speech. Some (myself included) have objected to the vatic nature of Heidegger's later writings. But prophecy is also a feature of everyday life or (in the Platonic sense) *doxa*. Everything turns upon the content or illumination of the prophecy. It is not irrelevant to observe that one criterion for distinguishing the true from the false prophet is virtue. A prophecy which negates virtue, or renders it "ontologically

neutral," has concealed something ingredient to the nature of the *Lebenswelt*, and hence to the whole.

Wittgenstein

I turn now to my final example, Wittgenstein. Once again, there is an initially striking resemblance between Wittgenstein and Plato. The *Tractatus* corresponds very crudely to Plato's concern with formal analysis, whereas writings like the *Philosophical Investigations* and *Zettel* remind one of the connection between *doxa* and everyday discourse. The general conclusion, putting to one side the difference between the early and the later works, is that no comprehensive *logos* of the whole is possible, nor is it desirable. On this point, perhaps, the Kantian influence is especially strong. I am thinking of Kant's remark in the *Second Critique* that, if man had knowledge of God and immortality, he would almost surely not act from duty. Even Wittgenstein's manner of writing is in a way Platonic; his remarks are like conversations without dramatic structure, or monologues in search of a dialogue. And unmistakably Platonic is the return to ordinary language in the post-Tractarian writings. More sharply stated, Wittgenstein's attempt to explain the origin of "metaphysical" or philosophical problems as the absence of clarity about ordinary language, is very much like the Platonic procedure. It is, however, radically anti-Platonic in its conviction that one may arrive at clarity about ordinary language, with the attendant dissolution of the philosophical problem. Put a bit too succinctly, Plato does not say that "ordinary language is all right." The clarification of ordinary language leads to extraordinary language, even though the latter must derive its justification in the former.

I shall try to illustrate the Platonic and anti-Platonic dimensions in Wittgenstein's later thought, with respect to the specific question of a return to the origin, in terms of his doctrine of rules, criteria, and the like (somewhat reminiscent of Kant's emphasis upon rules, laws, and principles). On the one hand, Wittgenstein seems to take his bearings by the sound observation that the use of language, although internally rule-governed to a considerable degree, is marked throughout, and somehow originates in, the human

capacity of "knowing what to do next."²⁴ Thus, for example, in one line of reflections, Wittgenstein points out that it is false to compare the use of natural language to the use of calculi or an ideal language, and so to insist "that someone who is using language *must* be playing such a game" (*Philosophical Investigations*, I, 81).²⁵ I take Wittgenstein to mean this: "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (I, 23). Each instance of speech may be clarified by comparing it to a game. But the comprehensive activity of speaking is not itself a game. The enactment of a *Lebensform* is in effect the "opening of the horizon" within which rules defining games are constructed and, of course, within which we are free to vary or disregard those rules. If language as a whole were itself a game, then we could define its rules, or give a *logos* of the whole. Wittgenstein quite clearly denies this. "Instead of producing something common to all that we call language, I am saying that these phenomena have no one thing in common which makes us use the same word for all—but that they are *related* to one another in many different ways" (I, 65). The whole point to the metaphor of "game" is that if there is an essence of language (as opposed to language-games: cf. 65; I, 92), it is not at all a Platonic *ousia* but the visible diversity of linguistic functions and structures, which can be variously analyzed and (evidently) indefinitely extended. This is why (within the never adequately discussed limits of the *Lebensform*) man is free to make rules. Rule-making corresponds to the Kantian spontaneity of *Verstand*. This is why Wittgenstein would oppose the effort to formalize natural language.²⁶

The erroneous comparison between language altogether and a calculus or game leads us to believe that "if anyone utters a sentence and *means* or *understands* it he is operating a calculus according to definite rules" (I, 81). In fact, as I just noted, when playing games, we ourselves make up rules, vary or violate them, and indeed perform acts for which there are no rules and cannot be any (I, 83). Wittgenstein puts the crucial point about rules as follows: "A rule stands there like a sign-post.—Does the sign-post leave doubt open about the way I have to go?" For Wittgenstein, the question of how to interpret the sign-post, or the fact that it is sometimes open to

doubt and sometimes not, "is no longer a philosophical proposition, but an empirical one" (I, 85). From a Platonic perspective, one may both agree and disagree with this remark. The question of how to interpret a rule cannot be equivalent to the assertion of a proposition, if for no other reason than that it requires *phronēsis* or, as Wittgenstein himself puts it, knowing what to do next, namely, the ability to see how the rule applies in a given context. But the distinction between philosophical and empirical is too narrow. For Wittgenstein, evidently, the enterprise of language therapy is directed toward a return to the origin in the sense of the cancellation of philosophy. Presumably, then, the turn from the philosophical to the empirical proposition is a salutary one. Differently put, philosophy is equivalent to what we normally call epistemology or semantics, that is, the analysis of linguistic rules. Yet this entire analysis, as we have just seen, takes place within the penumbra of an extra-legal *Lebensform*, and with the already evident intention of returning from epistemology or semantics to pre-philosophical experience. Wittgenstein evidently regards "knowing what to do next" as a pre- or even nonphilosophical activity, no doubt because every formalization of the decision, or construction of a proposition embodying a rule, presupposes the actual capacity to decide. This has vitiating consequences for his own doctrine, as we shall see in a moment.

To continue, then, one cannot give a rule for interpreting a rule. We must first know what a rule is, its domain, what it means to "apply" a rule, and so on. Most important, we have to know *what good* are rules, and the ends which they are designed to achieve. Wittgenstein says: "I have further indicated that a person goes by a sign-post only in so far as there exists a regular use of sign-posts, a custom" (I, 80; cf. I, 88ff). Given the variety of possible interpretations of a rule, as well as the need to recognize a rule *as* a rule, custom (presumably shaped by the *Lebensform*) determines which interpretation is to be accepted. Let me emphasize: this is the *origin* of a rule, not the result of a rule. "The word 'agreement' and the word 'rule' are related to one another, they are cousins" (I, 224; cf. I, 206). Or finally: "Don't always think that you read off what you say from the facts; that you portray these in words according to rules.

For even so you would have to apply the rule in the particular case without guidance" (I, 292). Wittgenstein's contention that his investigation is a grammatical one (I, 90) must be understood in this context. "Inexact" does not mean "unusable" (I, 88); there is no single logical analysis of our language. The grammatical investigation presupposes human freedom or spontaneity; it then shows us how we use *this* rule in such-and-such situations. Hence, too, the relation between Wittgenstein's grammatical investigation and Husserlian phenomenology: "Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it" (I, 124).

This is the necessary background for appreciating Wittgenstein's concern with solving puzzles, finding the next number in a sequence, interpreting ambiguous pictures, and the like. "A philosophical problem has the form: 'I don't know my way about'" (I, 123). Knowing what to do next seems to resemble acting in accordance with a definite criterion. But criteria for "fitting," "being able to," "understanding," and the like are extremely complicated (I, 182). The capacity to say "Now I can go on" is not in general equivalent to remembering a formula or fulfilling "a totality of conditions" for doing something in each case (I, 183). We need not consider in detail Wittgenstein's extended examples of this attempt to "go on" (cf. I, 186; II, xi, 203; II, xi, 219).

Let us now turn to the anti-Platonic side of Wittgenstein's teaching, and, if I am right, to its self-vitiating character. Wittgenstein regularly interprets "knowing what to do as 'how to get on' in the sense of 'actually doing something' or taking the next step. This is to say that, in his analysis, he leaves no gap for interior reflection or the exercise of *phronēsis*. Since actually to do something is to obey a rule, or to take a step for which a rule can be found, whether altogether or in part, the question as to the origin of the rule, or the intuition of which rule is applicable, necessarily leads us back to custom or the *Lebensform*. We have been trained to act in such-and-such a way. This training, as we have seen, is decisively not one of memorizing previously existent rules. Yet, since it cannot be distinguished from "doing" in the final sense of speaking correctly ("this is what I must do"), the temptation is very strong to explain "knowing how

to go on" or "what to say next" in terms of an analysis of the rules of speech as they define individual language games, but then more generally to construct a calculus for natural language altogether. And Wittgenstein surely encourages this line of development, no doubt unintentionally, or at least not in accord with his primary intentions.

It is pertinent to add a word at this point about "intention" itself. Wittgenstein makes reasonably clear that intention is a silent thinking about what to do next. This "is embedded in its situation, in human custom and institutions.... In so far as I do intend the construction of a sentence in advance, that is made possible by the fact that I can speak the language in question" (I, 337). And again: "one can only say something if one has learned to talk. Therefore in order to *want* to say something one must also have mastered a language" (I, 338). Again, "One cannot guess how a word functions. One has to look at its use and learn from that" (I, 340). It looks as though deciding what to do next is an application of our knowledge of a language, which in turn is a mixture of custom and rules. Since nothing of a primordial character can be said about the element of custom, this leaves the rules *qua* rules for our consideration. We thus commit ourselves with no reflection to a technicist historicism, in which technical facility is justified, if at all, by non-philosophical ideologies. The ideologies are themselves immune to philosophical criticism since to philosophize is simply to construct, employ, or interpret rules. We may arrive at much the same result through the following passages. "Intending" can be distinguished into two aspects, the "meaning" I intend, and the belief or psychological state that this is what I intend or ought to intend (cf. I, 676; II, ii, 176 and Zettel, 298, par. 44 ff.; 335 f., par. 231-6). An "intention" in the psychological sense is like a rule, sign, or signpost; it can be interpreted in various ways. Hence we need to agree on the right or acceptable interpretation. This agreement results in the formulation of a rule. Rational analysis then begins with rules or meanings, not with intentions, beliefs, or other psychological states. Wittgenstein does not wish to deny that these states occur (I, 304-8), but only that we can say anything about them which explains the use of words. Once more we see how the temptation toward

linguistic behaviorism, or the rejection of consciousness as an internal process by labeling it a "ghost in the machine," is encouraged by Wittgenstein.

The main point, however, is the consequent surrender to the arbitrariness or unreasonableness of the origin of rational *qua* rule-governed speech. Wittgenstein, as it were, both denies and encourages the temptation to replace *doxa* altogether by *epistēmē*. I believe this is an essential reason why his writings have given rise to such conflicting schools of interpretation. Wittgenstein's inclination, thanks to a pragmatist or constructivist bias, was always to interpret "what to do next" as "how to do something." Knowing "how to" is essentially knowing what to say. But there is a crucial difference between "how to" and "what." Wittgenstein's emphasis on "how to" led him to dissolve the unity intrinsic to *what* into a variety of particulars, that is, of particular instances of customary behavior. As I once expressed this elsewhere, Wittgenstein was forced to rely upon the silent intelligence of practice. In the deepest sense, deeper than his own insistence upon the same point, he had no doctrine of language because he had no doctrine of the speaker or his *Lebensform*. Wittgenstein says: "The common behavior of mankind is the system of reference by means of which we interpret an unknown language" (I, 206). But how do we interpret our language? Wittgenstein would presumably reject this formulation of the question on the ground that we do not interpret but use our language. Nevertheless, there is no satisfactory explanation for our capacity to use our language.

Wittgenstein himself seems to insist upon this in his remarks about the purely descriptive function of his grammatical investigation. Every explanation of the use of our language constitutes already a use of that language; this is the analogue to the earlier doctrine that no *logos* of form can be given, since the form is presupposed by every discussion of it. Explanation is thus determined by the agreement in a *Lebensform* (cf. I, 241). Since speaking a language "is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (I, 23), the use of one's language is presumably an instance of "the common behavior of mankind," and this seems to be further supported by Wittgenstein's

remark that he is supplying us with "a natural history of human beings" (I, 415). Wittgenstein's account of ordinary, i.e., regulative, language-use is thus self-contradictory. He claims to provide a natural history of the common behavior of human beings, but his history is defined by the specific *Lebensform* or historical situation of human activity, namely, his own, which thus determines his own use of language. Is this is not a *Schick des Seins*?

Wittgenstein enacts the Platonic enterprise of an attempt to return to the origin of philosophy in everyday speech, but his explanation (or description) of everyday speech is such as to drive us toward a technical, epistemic account of speech. The nature of everyday life is thus concealed as it is revealed. In a crucial paragraph, Wittgenstein denies that speech about use of the word "philosophy" constitutes second-order philosophy (I, 121). This should mean that we are able to grasp the validity and significance of philosophy in our return to its origin, without generating regressive definitions of what it means to "return" or to be an "origin." Unfortunately, such a meaning is blocked by the other strand in Wittgenstein's thought. "What has to be accepted, the given, is—so one could say—*forms of life*" (II, xi, 226). The given in the Platonic sense is *doxa*. However, for Plato, *doxa* has its own rational modes of discourse which are either distinct from, or shall we say possess only a family resemblance to, formal discourse. Wittgenstein's *Lebensform* is the historicized version of Kant's transcendental subjectivity. It is, so to speak, a mixture of Platonic and Kantian elements. The result is incoherent. I add this final quote from Wittgenstein. "A proposition, and hence in another sense a thought, can be the 'expression' of belief, hope, expectation, etc. But believing is not thinking. (A grammatical remark.) The concepts of believing, expecting, hoping are less distinctly related to one another than they are to the concept of thinking" (I, 574). To this, one must reply with a wise saying from Heraclitus: "If one does not hope, he will not find the unhoped-for, since it is not to be found and inaccessible."²⁷

I should like to summarize the argument of this paper in the following remark. In contemporary philosophy, one finds a curious attempt to "return to the origin" in the sense of the pre-philosophical

situation, yet to do so in terms of a technical philosophical method. The result is to assume that philosophy must (or ought to) be validated by a step backward which it is radically impossible to take. We cannot return to the origin, but are forever doomed to posit or construct it (or to have it, in the form of a linguistic super-being, construct us). This view, in one variant or another, is held by analysts, phenomenologists, and fundamental ontologists alike. It explains why one finds doctrines of commitment, resolution, creativity, and historical arbitrariness in the most diverse quarters of the contemporary scene. And (although I have not emphasized this point here) it indicates the extraordinary, still insufficiently grasped, importance of Nietzsche for twentieth century philosophy. One does not understand Nietzsche by attempting to transform him into a liberal scientist, or a linguistic analyst, but by uncovering the Nietzschean presuppositions of contemporary analysis. However, I took my bearings in this article by Plato rather than Nietzsche. This is because one finds the suggestion to return to the origin for the first time in the Platonic dialogues. The suggestion appears there in the form of a reciprocal functioning of poetry and mathematical thinking, by which man plays the crucial role in the "opening of the horizon" of cosmos or world. This role is not merely constructive or productive. And its nature is such as to allow us to return to it in its own terms, because we have never left it. The decisive step in detaching man from the natural origin is in the teaching of Kant. Kant replaces beings with concepts, and obscures the function of *phronēsis* by an excessive emphasis upon rules (the necessary consequence of his rejection of intellectual intuition and the receptivity of beings in favor of discursive thinking and concept-construction). The "reasonableness" of practical intelligence is then replaced by certain facts of (essentially Christian) morality and feeling. This accounts, among other things, for the co-ordinate development of conceptual analysis and the steady impoverishment of moral and political philosophy. Whether contemporary philosophers seek to transcend or to submit to *ratio*, they are no longer able to develop a reasonable philosophical analysis of ordinary human experience.

Notes

- 1 This paper was delivered before the Metaphysical Society of America in Boston on March 15, 1975. I thank the members for this kind invitation and for the stimulating discussion which followed. I am grateful to my colleague, Prof. Thomas Seeböhm, who made a number of valuable suggestions for improving an earlier version of the paper, especially regarding Husserl and Kant.
- 2 *Theaetetus* 153-4, 155-7.
- 3 Cf. Kant, *First Critique*, B62.
- 4 *Theaetetus* 161a-b, 181c.
- 5 *First Critique*, B130.
- 6 Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses refer to the *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1952).
- 7 Cf. *First Critique* B836; *Fundamental principles of the metaphysics of ethics*, tr. T. K. Abbott (London: Longmans, Green, 1934), p. 51.
- 8 L. W. Beck, *A Commentary on Kant's Critique of Practical Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, Phoenix Books, 1960), p. 245.
- 9 *Republic* VI, 508e, *Phaedo* 99c, *Timaeus* 28a-29a, *Laws* X, 903b-904b; cf. *Kritik der Urteilskraft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner: 1954), pp. 328, 360.
- 10 *Republic* VII, 518d: cf. VI, 500d.
- 11 E.g. *Theaetetus* 176a-b.
- 12 Cf. *Theaetetus* 145d ff. and my article, "Sōphrosunē and Selbstbewusstsein," *Review of Metaphysics*, June, 1973; collected in *The Ancient and the Moderns: Rethinking Modernity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989; Reprint: South Bend, Indiana: St Augustine Press, 2002).
- 13 *First Critique*, B94.
- 14 *Ibid.*, B171.
- 15 Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses refer to the *Third Critique*; for the edition, cf. note 9.
- 16 *First Critique*, B867.
- 17 *Ibid.*, B851.
- 18 Cf. *Third Critique*, p. 4.
- 19 On this point, Husserl resembles the Eleatic Stranger's description of *diaeresis*, with qualifications discussed above.
- 20 *Phaedrus* 229e ff.
- 21 Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses will now refer to *Die Krisis der Europäischen Wissenschaften*, Husserliana Band VI (Haag: M. Nijhoff, 1954).
- 22 Cf. S. Bachelard, *La logique de Husserl* (Paris: PUF, 1957), p. 111.
- 23 Unless otherwise noted, numbers in parentheses will now refer to *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1953).
- 24 *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 107, 146 should be consulted here.
- 25 Unless otherwise indicated, numbers in parentheses will now stand for the part and paragraph or section number in *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1965). If the reference is from Part II, I add the page number.

- 26 No doubt it was for reasons of this kind that he observed: "In der Philosophie darf man keine Denkkrankheiten *abschneiden*. Sie muss ihren natürlichen Lauf gehen, und die *langsame* Heilung ist das Wichtigste. (Daher die Mathematiker so schlechte Philosophen sind.)" Zettel, in *Schriften*, 5 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 365, par. 382. Cf. Nietzsche, *Götzen-Dämmerung in Werke*, ed. K. Schlechta, Bd. II, pp. 1018 ff., par. 43.
- 27 Diels, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Fr. 18.

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Production of Ideas

Thus far I have argued that Heidegger is mistaken in his formulation of the presence of a doctrine of the production of the Platonic Ideas.¹ But this does not mean that the doctrine of production is absent from Platonism. A productive element is to be found in Plato's account of the process of cognition, or what is today called "epistemology," as well as in the domain of praxis or politics. In the language of the *Republic*, we manufacture images of epistemic originals, but not the originals themselves. On the other hand, Socrates does say that the Idea of the Good is the cause of the being of the other Ideas. Depending upon what we make of statements like this, it seems possible to identify a productive component in the domain of the Ideas themselves. But this is not the same as to attribute the production of Ideas to human beings.

One may say that the crucial point in Platonism is the legitimacy of the distinction between the production of knowledge and the discovery of what regulates this production. Much the same situation obtains within Heidegger's own thought. I refer to the distinction between beings and Being. The central point of Heidegger's critique of Platonism is to preserve the encounter with the manifestation of Being from infection by human constructive activity. On this point, Heidegger is himself a Platonist, and he is guilty of the same unawareness of the implication of his effort that he attributes to Plato.

The serious question, however, is not that of textual interpretation. It is rather whether philosophy can be preserved from the virtual axiom of modern thought that we know only what we make. This question, in other words, is not captured in the discussion of a quarrel between genuine philosophical thinking and technology. Technology is itself one of the two principal weapons of poetry in its quarrel with philosophy, the other weapon being rhetoric.

In another series of lectures, this comment could be spelled out at the length it deserves. Here I can only mention that poetry is a force of emancipation or freedom of the will that animates modern technology, which is incapable of articulating its own ideology.

My own view is that this issue cannot be decided by logical argumentation. As Heidegger himself remarked on more than one occasion, a problem that can be resolved is not a genuine philosophical problem. This does not mean that arguments are irrelevant, but only that they are frequently selected on the basis of insights or pre-theoretical convictions about how things must be, even if we cannot succeed in a full demonstration of the veracity of those convictions. What Plato calls "recollection" and Heidegger "pre-ontological understanding" have something essential to do with this point.

One of the most illuminating examples of the nature of philosophical problems is the ongoing controversy among logicians and mathematicians about whether numbers, sets, relations, and so on exist or are produced by the practitioners of the techniques of formalism. It is obvious that logic and mathematics can be done at the highest technical level regardless of whether one is a Platonist or an anti-Platonist. The choice here is not simply between two kinds of mathematics, but rather between two philosophical interpretations of the nature of mathematics. Once the philosophical question has been answered, there are of course consequences for what counts as legitimate mathematical procedure. But it would be difficult to say that these consequences lead to better or worse mathematical reasoning. What counts as better or worse here is finally dependent upon one's philosophical views, not on differences in technique. It is therefore naive to assume that the nature of Platonic Ideas can be established or decisively clarified by the use of elaborate technical machinery. The first step here would be to establish the philosophical implications of the machinery itself.

Fundamental philosophical problems are then open to more than one technical approach, and which approach we choose is at least partly determined by what we regard as sensible. But this general difficulty casts its shadow across all philosophical theories.

To take a difficulty that is specific to the present series of lectures, we cannot say whether Ideas are produced until we know what they are. But there is no canonical statement of the doctrine of Ideas in the Platonic dialogues. Sometimes the main interlocutor speaks as though Ideas are the unique originals of which generated particulars are images, and sometimes he speaks as though we have direct access to Ideas. I note the suggestive fact that when Socrates is the main interlocutor, he usually makes a decent attempt to derive the plausibility of the existence of Ideas from an analysis of ordinary experience. Important examples are the *Republic* and the *Phaedo*. But in dialogues like the *Philebus*, in which Socrates is again the main speaker, and the *Sophist*, in which he is virtually silent, there is much talk of the division and collection of things in accordance with kinds, but no detailed description of a method for identifying Ideas that could actually be followed in a step-by-step manner. And the same is true of the art of dialectic itself as described in the *Republic*.

This difficulty is connected to the further embarrassment that it is not at all clear how to determine the precise domain of generated particulars to which Ideas correspond. The so-called "greatest genera" of the *Sophist* have nothing in common with Ideas of cows or horses (or what Aristotle calls separate substances), and neither of these is anything like formal relations, or moral attributes. And this is to say nothing of the vexed question whether there are Ideas of human artifacts like beds and tables. In the face of so much confusion and diversity, one scarcely knows how to go about investigating Platonism, let alone defending it.

Thus far in this series of lectures, I have taken my bearings by Heideggerian interpretations of particular Platonic texts, and tried to show that these interpretations are incomplete, implausible, or insufficiently precise. Today, my intention is different. By way of a conclusion to the entire series, I want to consider the main points of traditional Platonism, and to suggest some modifications that are required, not simply to meet Heidegger's objections, but to make Platonism defensible. Some of you may regard my modifications as a rejection of Platonism. But I make no claim here to philological orthodoxy. My goal is not to rescue traditional Platonism from the

mephitic atmosphere of the Schwarzwald. It is rather to indicate the intellectual work that these texts demand of us in the attempt to determine the truth.

I shall suggest three principles or what I call axioms of "Platonism" that underlie the doctrine of Ideas. By way of a prelude, let me remark that in my opinion, Heidegger is right to see the fundamental issue of Platonism in the quarrel between discovery and production. Whether discovery can preserve its independence from and priority over production, depends upon the aforementioned principles. If the principles require modification, this is not necessarily because Platonism is mistaken in its central adherence to discovery, but, as I believe is the case, it may be that the modifications are necessary to preserve Platonism itself.

Let us take our bearings by what Socrates calls in the *Republic* "our usual procedure" of establishing a one over many. That is, we collect together those particular items of everyday life which are all instances of the same family or nature. No argument is presented to justify our ability to divide and collect in accordance with kinds. The sameness of kind is directly accessible by inspection of the looks and behavior of the items themselves. Mistakes in identification are corrected by taking another look at the item in question.

This very preliminary account already provides the anti-Platonist with an objection. Have I not in effect granted that the discovery of sameness is itself a function of experience and that it cannot be established with the precision required for the presence of an Idea? But the point here is that even to suppose that two items are of the same kind is already to make use of what is perhaps the most important axiom of Platonism. It is an empirical question whether the items are indeed of the same kind, but it is a matter of principle that to be is to be something or another of such and such a kind. We could conceivably mistake a cow for a horse, in which case our collection of horses would erroneously include some cows. But this empirical error would not change the kind or Idea of horses into the Idea of cows.

In other words, it is false or seriously incomplete to say that we arrive at the notion of a class or kind by inspecting a large number of

individuals and finally drawing the inductive conclusion that they are all, say, cows. We could not "inspect" a single item if it were not already identifiable and re-identifiable as an item of this sort. This is a slight oversimplification, since explicit identifications of kind are surely embedded in the heterogeneity of experience, namely, the fact that experience consists from the outset of heterogeneity, that is, a multiplicity of items that can be sorted out into collections of a definite kind. After all, to identify is also to differentiate, and this is made possible by the identities of the items being distinguished. This is how we arrive at a one over many.

I believe that this helps us to understand Plato's apparently incredible doctrine of recollection. It would be circular to claim that we identify Ideas by discerning the sameness of kind in particular individuals, whereas we identify the kind of individual by reference to its Idea. If the identification is attributed to the vision of the Ideas in a previous existence, we still have to explain how the Idea was perceived in that incarnation, and this leads to an infinite regress. The simplest alternative is to say that the perception of the sameness in kind between two or more individuals is itself the apprehension of the Platonic Idea. "Recollection" thus refers to the realization that this is so. What precisely this means is a question that will occupy us throughout the balance of my lecture.

It is then of great importance to Platonism that misidentification is as much dependent upon kinds as is identification. To misidentify is to place something in the wrong kind, and this is possible only because we recognize that things exemplify kinds. That is, we identify and correct our mistakes by noticing that what seemed to be a horse is in fact a cow, not that there is no difference between horses and cows. Human existence as a whole is a process of dividing and collecting according to kind, and this in turn is because to be is to be something of such and such a kind.

The first axiom of Platonism is then the definiteness of things. A corollary to this axiom is that we cannot speak of Being in the Heideggerian sense except by contrast with speech about beings in the Platonist sense. But even farther, language is itself "Platonist" or thing-oriented, as is obvious from Heidegger's efforts to find a way

of "bespeaking" Being. To refer to Being, for example, as a round dance is to be as dependent upon reification as to speak of Ideas and essences. Even the speech that asserts the difference between predicates and Being is inevitably predication discourse. Either Being has properties or it does not. If it does, then we must employ predication and reification in attempting to explain it. If it does not, then we must keep silent.

Not at all obvious is the second axiom of Platonism, namely, that the kind or Idea, say of the cow, is separate from the changes undergone by the things of that kind, namely, cows. This axiom is necessary because of Plato's conception of knowledge as unchanging and indubitable. There is accordingly no genuine knowledge (*epistēmē*) of items of the domain of genesis, but at best correct opinion or belief (*orthē doxa*). Genuine knowledge, where it is possible at all, can only be of the Idea, that is, of the monad or unity that constitutes the "one" in a one over many. This corresponds to Heidegger's contention that for Plato, truth is the full presence of what is always and which presents itself as always what it fully is.

If the axiom of separation is rejected, then it is difficult if not impossible to prevent the contamination of the Idea by the uncertainty of genesis. On the other hand, if the axiom is accepted, it becomes equally difficult to explain how we discover the Idea at all, or if we do so, what role it plays in the existence and intelligibility of its empirical instances. From the outset, it looks as though the axiom must be modified in such a way as to prevent both contamination and complete detachment.

Axiom 2 raises the technical question of the relation between the one and the many that it unifies. It is this point that Aristotle elaborated into the *chōrismos* problem. How can the Idea be (what Aristotle calls) the essence of a given item if it is separated from that item? Must there not be a second form that expresses what is common to the item and its separate instantiation? And does this not lead to the infinite regression of the so-called "third man" problem?

Axiom 2 seems to sustain the following thesis. If the Idea cannot be distinguished from its generated instance, then we cannot

possess a full and complete intuition of what it genuinely is. There must be a difference between Idea and instance that is not a full separation. In the canonical terminology, the instance "participates" in the Idea. But how do we know this? Since Ideas are inferred from the sameness of kind of a collection of sensed particulars, it would be mistaken to hold that the Idea reveals itself, wholly or partially, in a spontaneous manner, entirely independent of sense-perception. The one *over* many is the one or unity of the many. We see or "intuit" the Idea by so to speak repairing the damage that is evident in the perceptual content of our cognition of multiple items. The justification for this step is that the changing aspects of, say, a cow, cannot in themselves be the stable formal properties that we know are necessary for things to possess an identity, and thereby to be identifiable as things of such-and-such a kind.

In sum, Ideas are continuously functioning in the domain of genesis, but it requires an act of retrospective analysis ("recollection") to become aware of them. Still more succinctly, we first cognize and then understand that and how we are doing so. This has a very important consequence. The different degrees of completeness that mark our grasp of Ideas at any particular time are quite distinct from the fullness of the present Idea. A blurred grasp of, say, a cow does not mean that the Idea of the cow is blurred. But neither does a blurred vision of the Idea of the cow entail the incomplete nature of that Idea.

In other words, there is no such thing as a partial Idea. Ideas do not have parts, although each "uncuttable atom" may commune or associate with other such atoms. The atom is uncuttable in much the same sense that there is no before and after, i.e., no owner and property, in the interior of an Aristotelian essence. If we could separate a formal structure into properties, then we would be dealing with an incompletely divided community of Ideas. But if I see that each member of a given multiplicity is of the same kind as every other member, then I have seen the full Idea that corresponds to every instance of that kind. In short, an Idea is not a complex structure of separable elements, although it may participate as an atom in such

a structure. The Idea is seen whole or not at all. But for that reason it cannot be like the perception of empirical cows or horses.

This raises a famous paradox that is discussed in the *Theaetetus*, and in our day by Wittgenstein. If Ideas (or formal atoms) are the last step of formal analysis, then they must each be perfectly simple, that is, have no heterogeneous parts. But in this case, they cannot be perceived, and so they all collapse into an Eleatic monad. It is for this reason, among others, that I have rejected the model of the original and the image as a satisfactory basis for explaining Platonic Ideas. Despite Plato's imagery, there is nothing visual about the apprehension of a Platonic Idea. The Idea of the cow is not a perfect portrait of what it is to be a cow, nor is it a perfect cow whose portrait we attempt to paint in the presence of actual cows.

What happens instead is that when we identify an actual cow, we realize (= "recollect") that the unity of this cow underlies the changing perceptual qualities in such a way that they do not prevent us from assigning the perceived cow to a definite kind. But unity can only be "seen" as this or that unity, and the precise identity of this particular unity is derived from the sameness of individual cows. In sum, I "see" the Idea of a cow when I see that this cow is the same as that one. But this is not to see a perfect cow standing over and apart from the perceived individual cows. Axiom 2 must therefore be modified to reject separation in the sense of distinguishing one world from another. The Idea of the cow is not an individual cow, but neither is it separate from individual cows.

There is one more objection to axiom 2 that should be briefly considered. The Platonist has claimed that even though things are continuously changing, we must admit that it is in each case some definite thing that is undergoing change. Even the thesis that everything is turning into everything else depends upon the assumption that we can identify the turning of one thing into another. But what counts as the limit of change before something ceases to be of the same kind and becomes something else? We can agree that everything is what it is without knowing what it is, and so too we can know that something is of some kind or another even though we

know very little about the nature of that kind. But in this case, it might be asked, how can we classify or identify anything at all?

The difficulty can be mitigated by the use of a previous argument. It is items of genesis that change, not Ideas. If the boundary between two kinds (or species) is impossible to determine because our sensory powers are inadequate to measure it, this means only that we will fail to notice the change in a given instance from one kind to another. But it does not mean that one kind will shift into another kind. The kind "Dinosaur" at some moment ceases to be instantiated; it is not transformed into the kind "reptile" or "bird."

The first two axioms of Platonism, then, may be summarized as follows. To be is to be of a certain kind, and the kind in question is not the same as the individuals of that kind. "Idea" is the word that Plato uses to distinguish the kind from its instances. The instances undergo change, which is to say that they come into being and pass away, but the kinds or Ideas do not. In this sense, we can say that the Ideas are eternal. This brings me to the third and last axiom. I note in passing that this axiom may more properly be thought of as a corollary to the second, but it is sufficiently important that I prefer to give it separate status. The axiom holds that the changing character of the instances of the domain of genesis makes it impossible for there to be genuine, that is to say precise and everlasting knowledge of them. But such knowledge is presumably possible of the Idea, and indeed, when we believe that we have obtained genuine knowledge of the instance, that knowledge is actually of the Idea.

But this knowledge has a very restricted nature. For example, as I have emphasized throughout, we can know that this is the same as that. And in those cases in which we are not sure whether this is the same as or other than that, we know that one or the other alternative is true, or in the worst case that we are in the presence of some third thing which is neither this nor that, but a thing of some other kind. What we do not know, or to be more cautious, what Plato never explains, is precisely what it is to be a cow. In other words, speaking very generally, there are two kinds of knowledge. One is of logical properties and the other is of what Kant calls "real predicates." The logical properties are the same in all cases. But the real predicates

differ from thing to thing; hence, they must differ from Idea to Idea. The ontological properties of Ideas are presumably all the same in the case of each and every Idea. But what it is to be a cow is self-evidently different from what it is to be a horse, and this must be exhibited in the difference between the Idea of the cow and that of the horse.

If we were to ask Socrates "what is it to be a cow?" he might first refer to the logical predicates of the Idea of the cow but not to its real predicates. For example, he might say that to be a cow is to participate in sameness and otherness. But the same answer applies in the case of dogs or horses. What we are presently investigating is the question of what it is to be this particular kind of thing that we identify as a cow. One of the peculiarities of Platonism is that logical predicates of Ideas are much easier to identify than real predicates. In fact, although I have been using the language of predication here for the sake of convenience, it must now be abandoned, because the difference between subjects and predicates does not apply to Platonic Ideas. I can say that this cow is brown, but not that the Idea of the cow is brown. And this is of course true for every property of the cow. Please note that this is not true simply of accidental properties. Assuming that I knew the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a cow, I could still not apply these to the Idea of the cow, for if I could, it would then become a cow. This small point is of crucial importance. It is why we cannot assign what I will call "phenomenological" properties to Platonic Ideas.

So far as I can see, no Platonist has ever told us what it is to be a particular kind of thing, cow or otherwise, simply by reference to an Idea, even though the point of the Idea is in each case to exhibit what it is to be this or that thing. This holds even if we employ contemporary biological concepts and say, for example, that the DNA of the existing cow exhibits what it is to be a cow. It may very well, but Ideas do not possess DNA. Furthermore, if we identify the Idea of a natural kind with its DNA, the same distinction arises that we met previously: namely, the distinction between what it is to be DNA in general (= what it is to be an Idea) and what it is to be this particular DNA, namely, that of the cow (= the Idea of the cow). In order to

discover the DNA of the cow, we analyze cows. We cannot derive any assistance in this task from the Idea-DNA because we have no information about its inner structure until we have discerned it in real cows.

So much for the sketch of what I have called the three axioms of Platonism understood as the doctrine of Ideas. This slightly cumbersome wording is necessary because one might reject the traditional or canonical conception of the doctrine of Ideas and still be a Platonist. For example, I myself accept the relevance of Platonic Ideas of logical entities and structures, but I am extremely dubious about the extension of the doctrine to other kinds of beings, such as cows and horses, not to mention justice and beauty, which time does not permit me to investigate more closely. My own explanation, or rather sketch of an explanation, of the Idea as the unity of some manifold clearly rests upon the rejection of the thesis of the separate and perfect original of which empirical instances are copies.

Still, it is not quite impossible to extend the doctrine to cover empirical particulars. As I have tried to show, one could argue that there is a difference between knowledge of the formal structure of empirical particulars and knowledge of the necessary existence of Ideas. To know what it is to be something or another is not the same as to know that there exists a Platonic Idea that corresponds to what it is to be something or another. This line of argument seems to be in accord with Socrates' claim in the *Phaedo* that the Ideas are the most stable hypothesis. The hypothesis takes into account the fact that identifiable individuals exist, and that they possess formal properties that preserve identity despite the continuous change of the domain of genesis. The claim is then that formal structure is necessary if there is to be a world at all. It is, however, the structure of *this* world or domain and does not constitute another world or domain. As to the fact that Ideas differ with respect to the kinds of natural things such as cows, horses, and so on, the response is as follows. Ideas are under the same necessity as things to be this particular entity and none other. To be an Idea at all is to be the identifying structure of some kind. And kinds are identifiable only

through difference. The simple explanation for why the Idea of the cow differs from the Idea of the horse is that cows differ from horses.

The Platonist response on this point also makes room for the obvious diversity in the kinds of Ideas that are discussed in the dialogues, ranging from ultimate ontological properties such as same and other to Ideas of separate substances like cows and horses. It also replies to the objection that we study cows, not the Idea of the cow, in attempting to determine what it is to be a cow. The reply is that it is precisely the Idea that we are studying in this case, which Idea is not separate from the cow but is rather its intelligibility. It is obvious that in order to take this line of defense, one must give up all talk of complete separation of the Ideas, and so too the explanatory paradigm of original and image. In my opinion, this is a net gain for Platonism, not a loss.

We also eliminate an ambiguity in traditional Platonism to which I have not yet referred explicitly: the ambiguity of the relation between "Idea" and "kind." This is evident in the discussion of the one over many, in which we were said to gather together a collection of individuals of the same kind, while asserting that the particular kind in each case is the Idea of all individuals of that kind. If the Idea is the same as the kind, then we see it at once in the perceptual identification of any individual whatsoever as this thing here of such-and-such a kind. It is the sight of the Idea that allows us from the very outset to classify items correctly as of this rather than that kind. Therefore the study of Ideas is precisely the study of perceptible entities, and not of separate Ideas which are reflected in the empirical shape or nature of their instances. If Ideas were such separate entities, then on the hypothesis of the one over many, we would first see the reflections or images of Ideas in the looks or kinds of empirical objects, because this is precisely how we discover Ideas. We do not first identify empirical formal properties, which we call "copies" or "images" of the original, and then check these images against our separate perception of a separate Idea. The step from the kind to the Idea is entirely superfluous, not because there are no Ideas but because the Idea is the kind.

In sum: the best defense of Platonism is to reject all talk of separated Ideas. But we need not and should not reject the doctrine of

recollection. I am of course not referring to its mythical formulation in conjunction with the doctrine of reincarnation, but to the empirically evident fact that we cannot know something of which we have no pre-awareness of any kind. When I encounter a strange object, the first thing I do (apart from experiencing fear, wonder, or some other emotion) is to attempt to classify it on the basis of my existing experience of kinds. This step is motivated, not by complete ignorance of the strange object, but rather by the recognition that it is strange, or in other words that it constitutes a new kind of being. This recognition in turn arises from the attempt to assimilate the strange object as closely as possible to one or a few already known kinds. We say: "X looks like a such-and-such in this way, but not in other ways." And so, step by step, we enact the process of division and collection in accord with kinds, moving outward from what is partly familiar toward what aspects of the strange object are perceived but not recognized. This outward motion is at each step made possible by the already existing structure of experience. Otherwise put, we are so constituted by nature as to assume that whatever we encounter, no matter how strange, can be classified as an instance of some kind or another.

In sum: we do not discover the Idea by an inference from our identification of the members of a determinate collection. On the contrary, in order to discover the individual element, and thus the entire multiplicity, we must first discover the Idea. What has to be emphasized is that we discover the Idea in the very act by which we establish the fact that this individual element is the same as that one. We don't move back and forth between two different worlds, but rather between two different dimensions of one and the same world. That we do not at the same time – or perhaps ever – understand that it is an Idea that we have discovered, is irrelevant. As to the poetical accounts of the ascent of the cognitive soul to a hyper-uranian *topos* of separate and perfect beings, we should, I believe, take this as Plato's way of emphasizing the marvelous nature of the intelligibility of this world, not of some other. In so doing, he also cautions us against the obstacles that stand in the path of retrospective analysis of the immediacy of intelligibility.

It should also be noticed that the present line of interpretation rejects Heidegger's account of Platonist *parousia*. In order to grasp the correct multiplicity, we must first see the Idea. But we see the Idea by recognizing each item in the multiplicity as of *the same kind*. That is, the Idea becomes visible not in itself, or as standing apart from all of its particular instances, but on the contrary as present within its instances. It is the particular element in the multiplicity that is of the same kind as each of the other elements. The expression "of the same kind" does not apply to the Idea but to the elements. One may object that when we ask, "Which kind is that?," we are referring to the Idea or one over many rather than to the many. My point, however, is that we cannot make this reference except by pointing to the elements of that kind. Nobody points to an Idea apart from elements of any kind. In sum, the Idea cannot be seen apart from its instances, and this constitutes a limitation on metaphysical presence, or what Heidegger calls *parousia* or *Anwesenheit*. What I referred to above as the immediacy of intelligibility is the full presence of the conditions that not only allow us to acquire knowledge of beings but that also restrict our capacity to analyze them. We can describe this immediacy in the excellent Heideggerian expression of the openness of the horizon. To know that the horizon is open is not the same as to try to analyze its structure. And besides, every step of analytical or calculative thinking is grounded in a prior awareness that cannot be reduced to elements of analysis.

Cumbersome though my analysis of the Ideas may be, the views that I recommend are in my opinion compatible with the actual ambiance of the Platonic corpus. I refer to the pervasive representation of philosophy as originating in ordinary experience. We have recourse to analytical and speculative reason in our effort to account for the coherence or immediacy of intelligibility, and so too of the immediacy of limitations on intelligibility. In a slightly paradoxical formulation, the limitations of intelligibility are also intelligible. In this sense, ordinary experience governs and prepares us for the pursuit of Platonic Ideas. Whether or not we can say with precision what it is to be something or another, the question never arises

except as addressed to a being that has already been identified as a something or other. The famous Heideggerian question of Being is itself a consequence of our analysis of the conditions for the existence of beings. But Heidegger deviates from Plato at this point. In the sense that Heidegger gives to the expression "Being," the Socratic question "what is *x*?" cannot be posed because Being is not a one *over* many. It is famously no "thing" at all, and hence not a definite one *among* many. Heideggerian Being is not a *what*. But this does not alter the fact that we are said to become aware of Being by the very process in which we see that it cannot be a one over many or definite entity.

This point leads to one more way in which to put the argument against separate Ideas. If Ideas were entirely separate from their instances, it would be difficult if not impossible to explain how one Idea differs from another. For example, in the Heideggerian exposition of the Being-process, that process of manifestation is the same everywhere, even though the manifested beings obviously differ, each from the others. But we cannot infer the properties of Being from our study of beings, because the very properties that make this being different from that one cannot be attributed to Being. In fact, Being has no properties at all, since each property is a determination, or a seeing of something *as* something, i.e., as something other than itself. If I may so put it, Heidegger suffers from a version of the *chōrismos* problem.

The immediate inference from the previous reflection is that there are no Ideas in general. Being is for Plato, of course, not general, but one of the "greatest genera," which is to say that it is not sameness, otherness, rest, or change. Ideas possess the same definiteness of identity as is to be found in generated particulars, albeit this definiteness is presumably unqualified and so permanent. The fact that there are many cows does not mean that there are many Ideas of the cow. On the contrary, the Idea of the cow is the perfect paradigm of what it is to be a cow and not another thing. To say that there is a second Idea of the cow is to say that cows have two identities, two distinct sets of conditions that make them cows. Let us say that this leads to the "third cow" regression.

Let me emphasize that we arrive at a vision of the identity of a cow, not by its independent manifestation antecedent to our experience with ordinary cows, but by a critical analysis of how it is possible for there to be anything at all, and why it is necessary that, if there is to be anything at all, it must be something of such-and-such a kind. I do not identify cows by glancing at the Idea of the cow; on the contrary, I am led to the Idea of the cow as what Socrates calls in the *Phaedo* the steadiest or most secure hypothesis about why I am able to identify cows. But this is perhaps stated too weakly. It is not a hypothesis but the first operation of cognition to see that each particular is not only the same as itself and other than every other, but also, that this individual is of the same kind as that one. Still more explicitly, we cannot help seeing the Idea, which is not just a (separate) kind, but the very kind of the individual we apprehend.

In sum, if genuine knowledge of the cow is actually knowledge of the Idea of the cow, it is nevertheless true that we arrive at knowledge of the Idea, if at all, then only through knowledge of the cow. The defining predicates of the cow are not elements in the Idea of the cow. We do not discover these predicates by turning away from the empirical cow in order to analyze the Idea. The study of Ideas is something quite different from the study of the properties of instances of Ideas. The question "what is it to be an Idea?" is quite different from the question "what is it to be a cow?" In what sense, then, can "knowing what it is to be a cow" be knowledge of the Idea of the cow?

In my opinion, the best answer to this question is as follows. In order for there to be things of any kind, there must be Ideas. But an Idea is not an original of which things are copies. Instead, it is the identity of a particular kind. Since things come in kinds, it follows that the Idea itself is of a particular kind. There are no Ideas in general. But there are general properties that belong to every particular Idea. This seems to entail that the eidetic properties of an Idea differ from the particular properties that make it an Idea of a particular collection of individuals. It is immediately obvious that what is peculiar to the identity of cows cannot also be peculiar to the identity of horses. At this point, I think it is necessary to

deviate sharply from the traditional Platonist doctrine. We have to distinguish between the ontological properties of Ideas and the ontic properties of things. This formulation is in part Heideggerian, but Heidegger, of course, does not attribute ontological properties to Ideas. And as I have emphasized, "Idea" in my sense is not an original to be imitated, but the exhibition of the identity of a kind. We determine the kind by observing the particular things, and in order to give prominence to the difference between the kind and things of that kind, we hypostatize the kind and call it an Idea. It is at this point that the problems associated with separation emerge, and Platonism becomes an unintelligible or incoherent doctrine.

The point that I have been trying to make for the last several minutes is that there is a difference between being an instance of some kind or other, and being an instance of this particular kind. Both conditions, the general and the particular, characterize instances and are visible only within them, although once having reflected upon them, we can consider them apart from the instance by a process of abstraction. Let us refer to the study of kinds as ontology. There is, however, no general name for the study of particular kinds. It is not a part of ontology to study the nature of horses; this study belongs to some branch of zoology. Since kinds are kinds of individuals, they will be individual kinds. The kind "horse" is not the same as the kind "cow." But the two kinds will have properties in common that stem from their both being kinds. These properties will not explain what it is to be a horse or a cow, but only what it is to be an Idea. Finally, we see the kind (or "Idea") simultaneously with the apprehension of its instance as of such-and-such a kind. But to see this is not to see, either immediately or indirectly, what it is to be a horse. That, to repeat, must be discovered empirically.

It will certainly be objected by the orthodox Platonist that my modification of the doctrine of Ideas has led to their abolition. And there is a sense in which this is true, as is obvious from my rejection of separate Ideas. In particular, I have rejected the notion of an Idea as the paradigmatic original of a family of individuals that provide us with blurred copies of the original. Finally, it could be objected that I have accepted Ideas in the purely formal or logical sense of

properties like identity, difference, and sameness, properties which at best account for the common structure of every particular Idea, whereas I have left unexplained, or relegated to the empirical or ontic level, what it is to be a cow, a horse, and so on. But this objection would be based upon a misunderstanding. My thesis is certainly not that there are only Ideas in general, but no Ideas in particular. On the contrary, every Idea is a particular Idea. What I insist upon is that the particularity of the Idea cannot be accounted for on the basis of the general properties of Ideas. How could one derive the eidetic look of the cow from identity, difference, and sameness (to mention only these)?

But this explanation seems only to leave the objection intact. For how can we derive the eidetic properties of what it is to be a cow from the empirical properties such as "four footed," "chews a cud," "yields milk," and so on? The answer is that we cannot, because *there are no purely eidetic properties of what it is to be a cow*. There are instead empirical properties that are subject to change. What does not change is the fact that we can perceive and study the empirical cow because of its adherence to the ontological properties of the structure of intelligibility that Plato regularly speaks of as "Ideas." It is this structure that regulates change and makes changing things intelligible.

What it means to be a cow may therefore change, but what will not change is our ability to identify what we mean by "being a cow." In Plato's mythical language, the Good casts its light on the Ideas and makes them visible. The Idea of the cow, taken as a particular Idea, stands for the intelligibility of the empirical cow, that is, for our ability to understand what it is to be a cow by studying cows. We can do this, not because there is a supreme or fully present cow standing above all real cows, at which we are actually looking for knowledge of cows in general, but because the ontological structure of intelligibility necessarily manifests itself as this or that kind of thing.

What does it mean, then, to claim, as does orthodox Platonism, that whereas we take ourselves to be looking at empirical entities in the pursuit of knowledge, what we are actually looking at is

the Idea or Ideas of these empirical entities? The only sense I can attribute to this claim is that the Idea of the cow is in fact present in each cow, and is not different from the kind of thing that cows are. It is therefore wrong to say that, in grasping the necessary and sufficient properties of cowhood, we are studying the Idea of the cow, as though we were reading a map or duplicating a painting of something that is independent of, and even transcends, what it is to be a cow. Our empirical knowledge of the nature of the cow may very well be incomplete at any time, but it is the intelligible nature of the kind of things cows are that makes it possible for empirical knowledge to be accumulated in the first place. And we discover this possibility by engaging in the process of acquiring knowledge, not by gazing at Ideas.

This conclusion, if it obtains, does not bring with it the dissolution of intelligibility. On the contrary, it sticks close to the common-sense view that intelligibility is fully ensconced within things, and that this follows from the fact that to be is to be something of such-and-such a kind, a way of putting the point that is, I believe, common to Plato and Aristotle. I cannot explain why there is something rather than nothing, or for that matter why there is consciousness of intelligibility. But there is nothing puzzling about the denial that things are mere generalities, or that they lack a definite identity. We say that the cow changes, and not, in imitation of Heidegger, that change changes.

What then are we to say about the issue of production? My own view is that we produce, or share in the production of, a good many things, including the instances of perceptual experience. We also produce the calculative reasoning by which the formal properties of experience are rendered more fully intelligible. But we cannot produce the formal properties themselves. For example, our neurophysiology, together with the laws of optics, produces the sensory individual known in everyday life as a cow. But it does not produce the fact that to be is to be something of such-and-such a kind. Nor does it produce the fact that to be knowable as a cow, that is, as the object of empirical study, the perceptual elements of the cow must obey the laws of identity, difference, and sameness.

It is now time to bring these lectures to a close. Let me remind you that there are no solutions to genuine philosophical problems. With respect to metaphysical production, the safest hypothesis is in my view the one that is presented to us by everyday life. No one can seriously deny the immediate inference from the acts of identification (and so too of misidentification), to the fact of intelligibility. What Heidegger calls "metaphysics" is the attempt to account for the fact of intelligibility as the production of its foundations or pre-conditions. I have tried to persuade you that no such doctrine is to be found in Plato. The doctrine that we produce the conditions of order cannot even be stated coherently, let alone adequately defended. The most we could do is to affirm the Kantian hypothesis that the conditions of order are constituted by the spontaneity of thinking. On this hypothesis, it would be more accurate to say that we are ourselves produced by the activity of cognition than that we produce it. The rules of order must be obeyed if we are to exist.

I have time to make one last extended remark about the issue of metaphysical production. As the argument has developed, there are two serious possibilities with respect to answers to the question "where are forms located?" I have been more or less calling these the Platonist and the Kantian alternatives. On the Platonist alternative, the forms are in some hyper-uranian *topos*. Somewhat less metaphorically, they exist outside the processes of mentation and are discovered by our perceptual and cognitive activity. On the Kantian alternative, the forms are what I will call "potencies" of thinking itself. They are not simply discovered, because our thinking activates them. But neither are they simply produced, because they express universal conditions that all creatures like ourselves must obey, and this would be true even if we produced the forms. That is, production itself is rule-bound. There is no thinking outside or beyond the compass of the transcendental concepts and rules by which the latter are constituted. They constitute themselves spontaneously as thinking occurs.

In my view, Heidegger's central obsession with the covering over of Being by beings is as applicable to Kant as it is to Plato. In both cases, the beings (*ta onta*) are constituted by the combined

activity of sense-perception and predicates available only to pure reason, whether we call these Ideas or concepts. In other words, Kant accepts the Platonist-Aristotelian thesis that to be is to be something definite and of such and such a kind. In neither case does one find any mention of a Being (*Sein*) that is not this or that entity of such and such a kind. The closest one comes to this is the reference to *epekeina tes ousias* in the *Republic*, but this refers to the Idea of the Good, and so is once more given a determinate if difficult to analyze identity. For Kant, of course, being is not a real predicate. It does not enter into the structure of an object in such a way as to differentiate one kind of object from another. Stated as simply as possible, for Kant, to be is to have a position within the world that is accessible to the scientific pursuit of knowledge. No one being differs from any other in the way that cows differ from horses, and every being in the world is the same as every other being in the sense that all have position. Differences of position can themselves be identified only by the differences in the objects that occupy them, but these latter differences, as I have just noted, are furnished by the object-predicates in each case.

This brief inspection of Kant was intended merely to bring out the underlying similarity between Plato and Kant, not to mention Aristotle, on the central question of metaphysical production. Similarity is of course not identity. But the differences are not so great as to obliterate the similarity.

Note

- 1 This chapter was the sixth and final of the Gilson lectures which Rosen delivered in November and December 2003, as the Etienne Gilson Lecturer at the Institut Catholique in Paris [ed.].

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Leo Strauss and the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns

The topic assigned to me is very broad, and in a real sense, it is coextensive with the work of Leo Strauss as a thinker and teacher. In a single essay, I can only deal with what I take to be the crucial phases of this work. In addition, it will be necessary to strike a balance between documenting what I take to be Strauss's attitude toward the quarrel between ancients and moderns, and attempting to assess its merits. It is often said that Strauss concealed his own views behind his persona as commentator on the great thinkers of the past. To the extent that this is true, one is not merely permitted, but required, to do more than summarize passages from Strauss's writings. However, as we shall see, it is not entirely true; on the decisive points, Strauss spoke in his own voice, or sufficiently so for us to be able to discern the fundamental presuppositions of his philosophical stance.

I begin with some remarks about the quarrel itself. It is often said that the quarrel between the ancients and moderns was in principle a dispute in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century France concerning the relative merits of classical and contemporary poetry. I shall suggest that this manner of viewing the quarrel is obviously unsatisfactory. On the other hand, a sound understanding of the quarrel shows that poetry, or *poiēsis*, was indeed at the heart of the matter. Let us first recall Francis Bacon's famous assertion in *The Advancement of Learning*: "These times are the ancient times, when the world is ancient, and not those which we account ancient *ordine retrograde*, by a computation backward from ourselves."¹ Bacon means, of course, that it is we moderns who are ancient because of our collective experience and accumulated knowledge of nature. It is true that, in order to understand nature, we must restrain her

"in the trials and vexations of art."² But no one would imagine that, by "art," Bacon is referring to what we now call the fine arts. He is referring to *technē* and experiment, not to epic or tragedy. The function assigned by Bacon to poetry in the usual sense is well brought out in the following observation. Poetry "was ever thought to have some participation of divineness, because it doth raise and erect the mind, by submitting the shews of things to the desires of the mind, whereas reason does buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things."³ Poetry corresponds to the imagination, which thus governs desire.⁴ One should compare these texts with Spinoza's discussion of imagination in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*. There is, however, an important difference between Bacon and Spinoza. Bacon does not provide a "metaphysical" foundation to science, but one that leads directly to the philosophy of history, not quite to the doctrine of continuous and unrestricted progress, but because of the ties to scientific and technological progress, to something very close to continuous progress. To put this in another way, whereas Spinoza looks backward to the ancients, and in particular to the Stoics, in what is despite his acceptance of modern science a decisive respect, Bacon does not. It is true that Bacon retains something of the classical doctrine of prudence. But on the decisive point, method, he sees himself as breaking cleanly with, and going beyond, the ancients.⁵ On this point Bacon is closer to poetry than he perhaps realizes.

In this connection, two additional remarks are helpful. The first is that Bacon's new method or "logic" has as its end to command and constrain natural work *ad meritum et usus vitae*;⁶ in so doing, the intellect mixes up its own nature with the natures of things.⁷ The sense of knowing as making is already visible here. Second, it is Descartes who decisively transforms the Baconian revolution against the ancients into a mathematical and scientific form. In so doing, Descartes subordinates the analysis of geometrical structure to the intention of the methodologist. The Cartesian method, as described in the *Regulae*, entails the imposition of humanly constructed rules onto diverse *subiecta* (i.e., objects of investigation: *hypokeimena*, or what lies under the gaze of the *lumen naturale*), thereby forcing them to submit to the unity, but also to the will, of the investigator's

intellect. The "natural" diversity of forms is then irrelevant to the modern revolution. "Human knowledge receives no more diversity from them than does the light of the sun from the various things it illuminates."⁸ The intellect "neutralizes" the diversity of natural forms by coordinating them to ratios of lines and symbols. Natural things are replaced by theoretical constructions, hence, in the broad sense of the term, by "poems," which are logically equivalent to the relations of natural things, and which we may manipulate in accord with the problems we wish to solve. Form is replaced by, or "transformed into," relations. The content of the relations, in the last analysis, is supplied by human passions, by desire and will. This must suffice as an indication of the sense in which the quarrel between the ancients and moderns is indeed about the status of poetry, or about what Socrates called the long-standing quarrel between philosophy and poetry.

I want to underline the fact that the explicit version of the quarrel is not about poetry but about science. To this end, I cite a relevant text, Fontenelle's *Digression sur les anciens et les modernes* (1688). Poetry, says Fontenelle, may be perfected relatively quickly, after a small amount of experience—as was true of the ancients.

But physics, medicine, mathematics, are composed from an infinite number of views, and depend upon the accuracy of the reasoning, which perfects itself with extreme slowness, and perfects itself continuously; it is often the case that the aforementioned sciences are assisted by experiences which chance alone engenders, and that they do not culminate at a determinate point. It is evident that all this has no end, and that the latest physicists or mathematicians will naturally be the most able.⁹

Philosophy, Fontenelle continues, has thanks to Descartes been perfected in this century. But Descartes' major contribution is his method, not the doctrines of his teaching, "of which a good part show themselves to be false, or very uncertain, according to the very rules which he has given us." Thanks, then, to the application of the Cartesian method, our posterity will surpass us, and *we* shall become "the ancients."¹⁰ On the crucial point, then, Fontenelle is a Baconian, not a Cartesian. He does not praise the present so much

as the future. As one could almost put it, modern scientific method is intrinsically a doctrine of historicity, according to which human beings produce their lives and destiny.¹¹

As Jonathan Swift points out in the *Battle of the Books*, apropos the quarrel between the ancients and moderns, the aggressor in a war is moved by poverty and pride.¹² In view of Leo Strauss's connection between the position of the ancients and what he calls an "economics of scarcity," this remark by Swift is especially pertinent for us. We should also remember the traditional association between pride and courage. The moderns are poor because (as they believe) they have been deprived of their heritage by the timidity, even the cowardice, of the ancients. In his debate with Alexandre Kojève concerning his interpretation of Xenophon's *On Tyranny*, Strauss points out that Xenophon does not mention courage among Socrates' virtues.¹³ In this connection, one should also consider Strauss's assertion that the superiority of spiritedness to desire, maintained in Plato's *Republic*, is questionable.¹⁴ In his unpublished lectures on the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Strauss emphasizes that for Aristotle, courage is the lowest of the virtues; the same point is made concerning Socrates in Strauss's (also unpublished) interpretation of the *Symposium*. This should be borne in mind when we consider that Bacon, in the *Novum Organum*, emphasizes that human beings underrate their strength.¹⁵ It is also pertinent to the fact that Descartes defines "générosité" or the highest legitimate self-estimation, as the "free disposition of our volitions," that is, the determination never to lack the will to carry out all those things one judges to be the best.¹⁶ Needless to say, preeminent among these is the desire to be master and possessor of nature. One may suggest that "générosité" is the Cartesian revision of Machiavelli's love of glory, with which Machiavelli associates the love of money.¹⁷ If it is true, as Strauss also argued, that Machiavelli is the father of modernity, we may see in the passage just cited from *The Prince* the paradigmatic association of poverty and pride in the modern quarrel with the ancients.

Poverty, when linked to moderation or temperance, may lead to Socratic, but certainly not to Baconian or Cartesian wisdom.¹⁸ Differently stated, Leo Strauss attributes to Plato the view that

whereas thought is both mad and fearless, speech must be moderate.¹⁹ This is the same as to say that action must be moderate: To give the decisive example, there can be no question of the conquest of nature. The reason for this, according to Strauss, is not the inconceivability to the ancients of the infinite perfection of technology (cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I, 1. xv), but what one may call a political decision or assessment of human nature. In a discussion of Rousseau published in *What Is Political Philosophy?* Strauss says: "On the whole the view has prevailed that democracy must become rule by the educated, and this goal will be achieved by universal education. But universal education presupposes that the economy of scarcity has given way to an economy of plenty. And the economy of plenty presupposes the emancipation of technology from moral and political control."²⁰ Although I cannot develop the point here, this strand of Strauss's critique of modernity should be compared with the strictures against reification and regimentation leveled against the Enlightenment by Horkheimer and Adorno. The post-modernist attack against the Enlightenment has its representatives on the Right and the Left, since it stems in large part from Nietzsche and Marx.

When Strauss refers negatively to the emancipation of technology from moral and political control, he is of course not taking a stand within the post-modernist camp but defending the priority of virtue to freedom; and by virtue he means the rule of the gentleman, the *kalos kagathos anēr*. The penultimate sentence of *Natural Right and History* tells us that "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns concerns eventually, and perhaps even from the beginning, the status of 'individuality.'"²¹ One should compare with this statement Strauss's discussion in his Hobbes book of the seventeenth-century replacement of prudence by history and political philosophy by technology, or of both by method.²² The immediate reference of the sentence in *Natural Right and History* is to the aesthetics of Edmund Burke. The ultimate sentence reads as follows: "Burke himself was still too deeply imbued with the spirit of 'sound antiquity' to allow the concern with individuality to overpower the concern with virtue." I cannot resist mentioning, as an aside, that the

tension in Burke between an aesthetics of individuality and classical virtue is paradigmatic for an understanding of twentieth-century "conservatism," with which Strauss and many of his students are associated. As one could also say, the modern taste for individuality has everything to do with the triumph of poetry over philosophy. Unfortunately for contemporary conservatives, this raises an insuperable difficulty for classical virtue.

Strauss never develops the aesthetic or poetic dimension of the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns. I mean by this that he never develops the metaphysical or ontological dimension of that quarrel. I do not believe that it suffices, in order to explain this omission, to say that his primary interest was political, or to note his view that the political is the gateway or antechamber leading into the theoretical. At this point, we require some illumination of Strauss's understanding of theory. To this end, I put to one side for the time being his preference for the virtue of the classical gentleman, and will quote a passage from *Natural Right and History*:

If we take a bird's-eye view of the secular struggle between philosophy and theology, we can hardly avoid the impression that neither of the two antagonists has ever succeeded in really refuting the other. All arguments in favor of revelation seem to be valid only if belief in revelation is presupposed; and all arguments against revelation seem to be valid only if unbelief is presupposed. . . . Now it is this state of things that seems to decide irrevocably against philosophy and in favor of revelation. Philosophy has to grant that revelation is possible. But to grant that revelation is possible means to grant that philosophy is perhaps not the one thing needful, that philosophy is perhaps something infinitely unimportant. To grant that revelation is possible means to grant that the philosophic life is not necessarily, not evidently, *the* right life. Philosophy, the life devoted to the quest for evident knowledge available to man as man, would itself rest on an unevident, arbitrary, or blind decision. This would merely confirm the thesis of faith, that there is no possibility of consistency, of a consistent and thoroughly sincere life, without belief in revelation. The mere fact that philosophy and revelation cannot refute each other would constitute the refutation of philosophy by revelation.²³

This passage is taken from within the context of a discussion of Max Weber. Despite that, and despite the regular use of "would," it is perfectly apparent that Strauss intends to state a genuine dilemma. The quarrel between the ancients and moderns has to be reassessed in the light of philosophy's apparent failure to refute revelation, and hence, to validate itself. It would seem that philosophy altogether is predicated upon an act of the will. But if this is so, does not the philosopher produce his own world, or, like the poet, create a world in the image of his desires, as these are mediated by the imagination?

We may reinforce the authority of the previously cited text as an expression of Strauss's own view by citing a parallel passage from the intellectual autobiography appended to the 1962 edition of his early study, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*:

The orthodox premise cannot be refuted by experience or by recourse to the principle of contradiction. An indirect proof of this is the fact that Spinoza and his like owed such success as they had in their fight against orthodoxy to laughter and mockery. By means of mockery they attempted to laugh orthodoxy out of its position from which it could not be dislodged by any proofs supplied by Scripture or by reason... The genuine refutation of orthodoxy would require the proof that the world and human life are perfectly intelligible without the assumption of a mysterious God; it would require at least the success of the philosophic system: man has to show himself theoretically and practically as the master of the world and the master of his life; the merely given world must be replaced by the world created by man theoretically and practically. Spinoza's *Ethics* attempts to be the system but it does not succeed; the clear and distinct account of everything that it presents remains fundamentally hypothetical. As a consequence, its cognitive status is not different from that of the orthodox account... philosophy, the quest for evident and necessary knowledge, rests itself on an unevitable decision, on an act of will, just as faith does. Hence the antagonism between Spinoza and Judaism, between unbelief and belief, is ultimately not theoretical but moral.²⁴

Is this conclusion valid for Strauss only relative to Spinoza, as the previous conclusion may be thought to be valid relative to Max Weber?

I cannot believe that a thoughtful reading of these passages supports such a conclusion. Fortunately, we can clinch the point by citing from Strauss's debate with Kojève, in which he speaks in his own voice without qualification. We need three passages from this text. First:

Philosophy as such is nothing other than the real consciousness of the problems, that is to say, of the fundamental and comprehensive problems. It is impossible to think about these problems without being attracted toward a solution, toward one or the other of certain rare typical solutions. However, as long as there is no wisdom, but only the search for wisdom, the evidence of all these solutions is necessarily smaller than the evidence of the problems. As a result, the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher from the moment that his "subjective certitude" of the truth of a solution becomes stronger than the consciousness that he may have of the problematical character of this solution. At this moment, the sectarian is born.²⁵

Second:

The classics identified satisfaction with happiness. The difference between the philosopher and the political man will therefore be a difference concerning the subject of happiness. The dominant passion of philosophy is the desire for the truth, that is to say, for the knowledge of the eternal order or of the eternal cause or causes of the whole.²⁶

Third:

Philosophy in the strict and classical sense is the search for the eternal order or for the eternal cause or causes of all things. I suppose therefore that there is an eternal and unchangeable order within which history takes place, and which is in no manner affected by history.²⁷

In the remainder of this passage, Strauss goes on to speak of other "presuppositions" of the philosopher in the strict sense. This page should be carefully compared with *Natural Right and History*, pp. 30–31, where Strauss describes the presuppositions attributed to philosophy by those who attempt "to establish the dogmatic and hence arbitrary or historically relative character of philosophy proper."²⁸

We can now safely conclude that for Strauss, philosophy is a passion or desire, i.e., an eros, but hence, too, an act of the will by which we presuppose what we need in order to gratify that eros. One could perhaps doubt from this set of passages whether the act of will is motivated by a moral decision or by the desire for pleasure. In my view, the latter is the case, and the moral decision is part, if not the basis, of Strauss's exoteric teaching. This teaching, or political philosophy, as Strauss says in the debate with Kojève, has as its function "to persuade the city that philosophers are not atheists, that they do not profane all that the city holds sacred, that they respect that which the city respects, that they are not subversives, finally, that they are not irresponsible adventurers but good citizens and even the best among the citizens."²⁹ That this is Strauss's exoteric teaching is altogether clear from a remark on an earlier page in the same text: "In raising his gaze to investigate the eternal order, all human things and all that which pertains to humanity reveal themselves to him very clearly as paltry and ephemeral, and no one can find a solid happiness in that which is paltry and ephemeral."³⁰ These passages should be compared with Nietzsche's very frank discussion of the distinction between the esoteric and the exoteric in *Beyond Good and Evil*.³¹ But they should also be compared with one of the most important, and most neglected, passages in Plato, *Philebus* 28C, in which Socrates says: "All the wise agree, thereby exalting themselves, that intellect is king for us of heaven and of earth. And perhaps they speak well."

Let me repeat my conclusion. The quarrel between reason and revelation is settled for Strauss, i.e., for himself, not solely or primarily by an act of the will, but by eros. The act of the will is subsequent to this desire; as a consequence, the *Republic* must be rewritten in such a way as to make desire higher than spiritedness, with a consequent demotion of courage. Courage is replaced by prudence. More immediately important for us, philosophy cannot validate itself rationally. I believe that this is connected for Strauss with his understanding of the so-called Platonic Ideas. According to Strauss, the usual version of this doctrine as stated by Socrates in the *Republic*, "is very hard to understand: to begin with it is utterly incredible,

not to say that it appears to be fantastic."³² In an unpublished graduate course on Plato's *Statesman* given at the University of Chicago in the early 1950s, Strauss expands briefly upon the Ideas as the articulation of noetic heterogeneity. In his published writings, no such expansion occurs. Instead, in *What Is Political Philosophy?* Strauss speaks of "the unchangeable ideas, i.e. of the fundamental and permanent problems."³³ I can confirm from private conversations that this was Strauss's view of the matter. The Ideas are the "fundamental and comprehensive problems" to which philosophy in the genuine or classical sense is dedicated.³⁴ The philosopher can know these problems, as well as the rare typical solutions to them, but he cannot know which solution is in fact correct for each problem. Unfortunately, Strauss leaves it entirely mysterious how we can know that certain problems or solutions are fundamental and comprehensive, if we cannot know the foundations or the whole. If the Platonic Ideas in the traditional or Platonic sense are replaced by problems, then the foundations are removed as well. The term "fundamental" becomes an honorific term for human or perhaps for epochal perspectives. We are dangerously close to Nietzsche.

I want to offer a speculation on this rejection of the Ideas, or on their replacement by problems. I suspect that Strauss did not take seriously the doctrine of the noetic perception of pure form. It is my impression—and I emphasize that it is no more than an impression—that for Strauss, philosophy is discourse. Or in slightly different terms, I suggest that Strauss regarded philosophy as finally impossible because of the impossibility of furnishing the discursive validation of the foundations. For this reason, the foundations became problematic and, finally, problems. Perhaps Strauss was struck by the paradoxical discontinuity between eros and the Ideas toward which it is ostensibly directed. But whatever the merits of my conjecture, the following result is plain. The Straussian philosopher is condemned to infinite conversation, or what his friend Kojève more ruthlessly called infinite chatter. This is because there is no theoretical foundation or superstructure to Strauss's conception of philosophy. And therefore he is forced to direct his "zetetic skepticism" or investigative looking toward practice. Strauss is forced

to defend philosophy, which is for him discursively indefensible in its own terms, by turning to the prephilosophical situation. Since nature is, as it were, theoretically invisible, Strauss attempts to find it in practice. On this point, his esoteric and his exoteric doctrines converge.

We are now almost ready to return to Strauss's noted preference for the virtue of the gentleman. I want to make one preliminary and general remark. The turn to the prephilosophical situation merely carries with it one's philosophical perceptions, or lack of perceptions. The prephilosophical situation is not a magical revelation of the origins of philosophy. This is because the prephilosophical situation contains *everything*; it therefore contains the unphilosophical or sophistical as well as the philosophical. The distinctions do not identify themselves to the neutral observer. To suggest that they do is to accept the myth of positivism. This same myth underlies Strauss's thesis that the task of the scholar is to understand a philosophical text exactly as it was intended, to the extent that this thesis is buttressed by a hermeneutical method and the tacit assumption of the neutral reader who is passively open to the thoughts of the author. On the other hand, the turn to the prephilosophical has utility for the philosophical construction of an exoteric political philosophy. And this is precisely the use to which Strauss, in my opinion, puts such a turn.

I would call Strauss's preference for the gentleman "exoteric," not because it had no correspondence to his own political tastes, but because these tastes, on his own testimony, are philosophically irrelevant. If this statement seems shocking, one has only to recall the passages I have already quoted about the paltriness of human things. Political philosophy is for Strauss "the political, or popular treatment of philosophy."³⁵ It has two main functions. The first, as we have already noticed, is to protect the philosopher from the city. The second is to lead the best citizens to philosophy. I mention immediately that, if Strauss believed that the best way to lead the best citizens to philosophy was by advocating a regime of rural aristocrats, then I am in sharp disagreement with him. This to one side, on Strauss's view, a concern for the virtue of the nonphilosophical citizens,

while genuine enough, is clearly subordinate to the primarily philosophical, i.e., defensive, intentions of political philosophy. These intentions emerge from and are defined by the natural distinction between the few and the many, and the resultant inextinguishable conflict between the eros of the philosophers and the opinions or desires of the nonphilosophers. Philosophy seeks to replace opinions by knowledge, whereas the citizen seeks to preserve the opinions of the city. The philosopher is motivated by a desire for truth: the citizen is motivated, in the highest instance, by the love of honor. Perhaps the most comprehensive formulation of the conflict between the philosopher and the nonphilosopher may be expressed as follows. The citizen's love of honor is mitigated by his fear of the gods. The philosopher's love of honor is transformed into, or eclipsed by, his love of the Ideas. However, the Ideas are accessible to the philosopher only as problems. Philosophy therefore represents a double danger to the city. First, it transforms the traditional gods into Platonic Ideas. Second, it transforms Platonic Ideas into unresolvable problems. Philosophy thus takes away the foundations of the city but cannot replace them with a theoretical foundation. As a consequence, philosophy must invent a rhetorical foundation for the city that mediates between love of the best and love of one's own.

Whereas philosophy begins in the study of nature,³⁶ and so in the study of the particular natures in their totality, or the whole,³⁷ political philosophy begins when philosophy is brought down from heaven into the cities of men. In order to understand the political in its proper or natural terms, one must go back to its origins in classical antiquity. Strauss distinguishes between classical and modern political philosophy in two not altogether compatible ways. First, classical political philosophy differs from its modern counterpart because its highest theme is the life of the wise.³⁸ Incidentally, if this is true, it has to be added that classical political philosophy casts no direct light on the life of the wise, or presents it in exoteric terms. Second, classical political philosophy takes its bearings by "moral distinctions as they are made in everyday life." As a consequence, it "limited itself to addressing those who . . . took these

distinctions for granted."³⁹ Classical political philosophy sees things with unequaled freshness⁴⁰ because it starts from the "natural" or "prephilosophical,"⁴¹ i.e., from the exact distinctions of political life itself,⁴² prior to their transformation and concealment by theories in the constructive sense of the term.

As our passages suggest, Strauss holds that moral distinctions are not only natural but that they are directly accessible in a way that theoretical distinctions are not. Or perhaps the theoretical distinctions may be visible, but without revealing their intrinsic natures. A perception of the Idea of justice does not tell us what is just in the given case. On the other hand, at least according to Strauss, we have, or may obtain, perceptions of what is just in the given case by considering that case. Assuming for the moment that this is so, what bearing does it have upon the thesis that classical political philosophy has as its highest theme the life of the wise man? We already know from Strauss that this life entirely transcends the city and, indeed, all human things. It must therefore transcend natural, political, or prephilosophical moral distinctions. But even further, the philosopher as philosopher cannot in any way be interested in moral distinctions. If classical political philosophy is the popular presentation of philosophy, then it cannot take its bearings by prephilosophical moral distinctions. It must rather take its bearings by the transpolitical or purely theoretical objects of philosophical eros. *But on Strauss's account, there are no such objects.*

To be sure, Strauss claims that prudence and the "lower world" of political action cannot be seen properly "without some knowledge of 'the higher world'—without genuine *theoria*."⁴³ If, however, the Ideas are problems, then the "lower world" must itself appear problematical. Furthermore, as Strauss points out, "Aristotle's cosmology, as distinguished from Plato's, is unqualifiedly separable from the quest for the best political order. Aristotelian philosophizing has no longer to the same degree and in the same way as Socratic philosophizing the character of ascent."⁴⁴ Strauss is of course referring here to the sharp distinction in Aristotle between theoretical and practical reason. But therefore, when Strauss attributes to Aristotle a belief in "a natural harmony between the whole

and the human mind" and adds that "man would not be capable of happiness if the whole of which he is a part were not friendly to him,"⁴⁵ it in no way follows that the prephilosophical situation is the gateway to philosophy. Contrary to Strauss's assertion, Aristotle's preference for the gentleman and gentlemanly virtue casts no light upon the wise man or the theoretical life. The following typical statement by Strauss is either in contradiction with his own understanding of Aristotle's philosophy, or it is a part of his exoteric teaching: "The life of the perfect gentleman points toward the philosophic way of life. . . . The gentleman is by nature able to be affected by philosophy; Aristotle's political science is an attempt to actualize this possibility."⁴⁶

In general, the same must be said about Strauss's extension of this thesis to Plato, and to "the classics" generally. This extension is made, for example, in *Natural Right and History*:

The administration of the law must be intrusted to a type of man who is most likely to administer it equitably, i.e. in the spirit of the wise legislator. . . . The classics held that this type of man is the gentleman. The gentleman is not identical with the wise man. He is the political reflection, or imitation, of the wise man. Gentlemen have this in common with the wise man, that they 'look down' on many things which are highly esteemed by the vulgar or that they are experienced in things noble and beautiful. They differ from the wise because they have a noble contempt for precision, because they refuse to take cognizance of certain aspects of life, and because, in order to live as gentlemen, they must be well off.⁴⁷

Whatever we may think of these assertions as expressions of sound political thinking, the fact is that they are unsupported by Strauss's broad view of the nature of philosophy in the genuine, i.e., classical, sense. And so far as I know, they are unsupported by a single passage from Plato and Aristotle themselves. Yet these views summarize the political formulation of Strauss's critique of modernity and attempted rehabilitation of classical political philosophy.

My own view is quite different. I believe that the advocacy of the rule of gentlemen expresses the Platonic-Aristotelian conviction that there is *no* direct connection between philosophy or the

life of theory, and politics or the life of practice. To the contrary, as Strauss regularly asserted, the unresolvable antagonism between philosophy and politics is one of the main causes of philosophical esotericism. One must infer from Strauss's own principles that no political book is genuinely philosophical unless it is exoteric. In the strict sense of the terms, political philosophy is not philosophy at all but rhetoric, or a noble lie. Thucydides' silence about philosophy, also noted by Strauss, is in my opinion the correct political inference to be drawn from Plato and Aristotle. And this is entirely compatible with the telling of elaborate noble lies in the attempt to preserve philosophy from the merited hatred of the nonphilosophers.

If we put to one side contingent questions of taste, what is the *theoretical* justification for classical political virtue and the claim that the regime of rural aristocrats possesses some kind of paradigmatic status for human beings at all times, with necessary consideration for the local conditions? It is begging the question to identify the aristocratic code with the natural perception of nobility. This conception of nobility rests upon the assumption that the crucial distinction between the few and the many is unchangeable, or changeable only through the sacrifice of nobility itself. However, this is precisely what defenders of modernity deny. Strauss tries to mitigate, even to conceal this fact by his regular assertion that the founders of modernity lower their standards, or look to efficacy, utility, pleasure, comfort, and so on, whereas the ancients looked to nobility and the life of the wise. He never gives an adequate hearing to the defense of modernity, according to which what the classics call nobility is at bottom *baseness*. By this same defense, classical political philosophy is base in its practical consequences because it is the result of cowardice, or the denial that courage is a philosophical virtue, for all the talk about philosophical madness. And let me repeat that, if courage is not a philosophical virtue, this is because, contrary to Strauss's exoteric teaching, there is no connection between philosophy and politics.

One could also say that courage becomes a philosophical virtue thanks to the rise of modern science, which expands man's power indefinitely. Strauss's critique of modernity depends upon

his drawing entirely, or largely, negative conclusions from the application of modern science. I would never deny that there is considerable historical evidence at his disposal. Nevertheless, I deny that the inference is sound, either philosophically or politically. But this is not the occasion to develop a defense of modernity. We are primarily concerned with the teaching of Leo Strauss. We therefore note that, according to Strauss, modern thought in all its forms is determined by the idea of progress,⁴⁸ that it is of British origin (Hobbes and Bacon: the will to power and technology),⁴⁹ and hence is rooted from the outset in Enlightenment.⁵⁰ Strauss's critique of modernity is thus a critique of the Enlightenment, similar to that of Nietzsche, but also entirely typical of what has frequently been called "post-modernism." Strauss also shares the characteristically Nietzschean ambiguity of fluctuating between a view of philosophy as pure theoretical contemplation, as unsatisfiable eros, and as a radically nonrational commitment of the will. The fundamental difference between Strauss and Nietzsche is in my opinion this: Nietzsche rejects theoretical truth in favor of art. Strauss rejects theoretical truth in favor of prudence. Nietzsche, like Strauss, defends the classical perception of nobility. But whereas Strauss associates this perception with an unstable blend of theory and practice, Nietzsche associates it with production.

Strauss's relatively low estimate of poetry, together with his practice of esotericism, is thus quite reminiscent of the founders of modernity, and in particular, of Bacon.⁵¹ As a post-modern or successor to Nietzsche and Heidegger, Strauss is in a position to understand that modern science is at bottom neither theory nor practice, but *praxis*, and hence, poetry. His exoteric rehabilitation of classical political philosophy may therefore best be understood as the attempt to distinguish philosophy from poetry. Unfortunately, it is seriously weakened because of the absence of a coherent and convincing view of philosophy. Finally, one must also raise the question as to the appropriateness of Strauss's rhetoric in a post-modern age. This was a question Strauss himself took seriously, as I know from personal correspondence with him. Unfortunately, he is no longer here to continue the conversation.

Notes

- 1 *The Works of Francis Bacon*, 14 vols., eds. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, and D. D. Heath (Stuttgart: Frommann Verlag, Gunther Holzboog, 1962), vol. 6, p. 130 [1605 AD]. Hereafter, SEH.
- 2 *Ibid.*, p. 188.
- 3 *Ibid.*, p. 203.
- 4 *Ibid.*, p. 182.
- 5 E.g., *Novum Organum*, SEH 1, pp. 234–236.
- 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 209 f., 214, 234.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p. 219.
- 8 René Descartes, *Regulae ad directionem ingenii: Texte critique établi par Giovanni Crapulli avec la version hollandaise du XVIIème siècle* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1966), p. 2.
- 9 Bernard Fontenelle, *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes: Digression sur les Anciens et les Modernes*, ed. R. Shackelton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955), p. 166.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p. 167.
- 11 *Ibid.*, p. 175.
- 12 Jonathan Swift, *A Tale of a Tub and Other Writings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1920), pp. 218–219.
- 13 "Tyrannie et Sagesse," in *De la Tyrannie* (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1954), p. 305. Hereafter, TS. Cf. Leo Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1972), p. 31. Hereafter, XS.
- 14 Leo Strauss, *The City and Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp. 110–111. Hereafter, CM.
- 15 *Novum Organum*, SEH 1, p. 199.
- 16 *Passions*, III, article 153.
- 17 Niccolo Machiavelli, *Il Principe*, eds. S. Bertelli and F. Gaeta (Feltrinelli: 1960–1964), ch. 25, pp. 99–100.
- 18 Cf. XS, p. 78; Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy? and Other Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 36–37. Hereafter, WPPH.
- 19 WPPH, p. 32. Cf. CM, p. 229, where the same distinction is attributed to Thucydides.
- 20 WPPH, p. 37.
- 21 Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), p. 323. Hereafter, NRH.
- 22 Leo Strauss, *Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Its Genesis*, trans. F. M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 86–87, 152.
- 23 NRH, p. 75.
- 24 Leo Strauss, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. F. M. Sinclair (New York: Schocken Books, 1982), pp. 28–29.
- 25 TS, pp. 316–317.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p. 319.
- 27 *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- 28 Cf. NRH, p. 125.

- 29 TS, pp. 332–333.
- 30 *Ibid.*, p. 319.
- 31 Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits Gute und Böse*, in *Werke in drei Bänden*, ed. K. Schlechta (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 1954–1956).
- 32 *History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey (Chicago: Rand McNally and Company, 1963), p. 27.
- 33 WPPH, p. 39.
- 34 TS, pp. 316–317; NRH, p. 32.
- 35 WPPH, pp. 93–94.
- 36 NRH, p. 82.
- 37 WPPH, p. 11.
- 38 *Ibid.*, p. 91.
- 39 *Ibid.*, p. 89.
- 40 *Ibid.*, p. 27.
- 41 *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- 42 *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- 43 NRH, p. 321.
- 44 CM, p. 21.
- 45 *Ibid.*, p. 41.
- 46 *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- 47 NRH, pp. 141–143.
- 48 WPPH, p. 76.
- 49 *Ibid.*, p. 172.
- 50 NRH, p. 198.
- 51 Consider *Advancement*, SEH 6, p. 290, where Bacon criticizes the modern use of esotericism, together with *New Atlantis*, SEH 5, p. 411, where the practice of esotericism in Bacon's utopia is made plain.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

An Introduction to the Philebus

The *Philebus* is one of Plato's most difficult dialogues. I know of no full-length commentary (as opposed to monographs or annotated translations) and even monographs on some particular topic in the dialogue are relatively few. The three topics that have attracted the most attention are those of eidetic analysis, categorial separation and mixture, and pleasure, especially false pleasure. In my opinion, it is a mistake to attempt to study these topics as though they are intelligible apart from the context of the dialogue as a whole. Unfortunately, the dialogue is almost as obscure from a dramatic standpoint as from that of its most famous themes. In this lecture, I will try to indicate two or three general characteristics of the dialogue, and I shall do so by eliciting them from a discussion of the opening pages. Despite the peculiarly spare nature of the dramatic form, the *Philebus* is no exception to the general principle that Plato prefigures the subsequent discussion of a dialogue in his initial scene. My intention is not to add to the technical analyses of the discussions of eidetic and ontological structure, but rather to cast some light on their peculiar status in a discussion of the good life for ordinary mortals rather than philosophers, and in particular, in a discussion with two quite ordinary interlocutors like Philebus and Protarchus. What follows is therefore in no sense intended as a summary of the dialogue as a whole, but rather as the opening of a path into the study of that whole.

I

"Philebus" is a proper name, attached to an otherwise unknown person who is a principal if unusually taciturn character in the drama we are about to study. The name means literally "love boy."¹ Socrates begins the *Philebus* as follows: "Now look, Protarchus, at the *logos* you are about to receive from Philebus, and at ours,

which you are about to dispute, unless you say that you agree with it. Do you want me to give the main points of each position?" (11a1-b2). A number of scholars have commented on the oddness of this beginning.² In the typical Platonic dialogue, we are provided with an initial orientation by the dramatic details of the time, setting, and personnel of the conversation. Sometimes this orientation is more complex, as in those dialogues that begin with a prologue, within which the details of the main conversation are recollected, whether by a participant in the original event or someone else. The *Gorgias* also begins rather abruptly, but not to the same degree as the *Philebus*. In the former case, the eponymous interlocutor is a famous rhetor, whereas Philebus is initially significant for his name alone.

At first glance, then, it looks as though the dramatic orientation of the *Philebus* is restricted to its abruptness. One might surmise that this is a mark of the old Plato's steady loss of interest in literary form, but even dialogues often assumed to be late like the *Sophist*, *Statesman*, and *Laws* provide us with a dramatic context within which to situate the conversation. If we look to the content of the *Philebus* for some explanation of its peculiar form, we are again left puzzled. The *Philebus* is an unusually difficult dialogue, as we are about to see, but no more so than the *Timaeus* or *Parmenides*, both of which have a rather elaborate dramatic beginning. There is, however, one other peculiarity of the *Philebus* that, although it initially deepens the puzzle of the dramatic form, may assist us in taking our bearings.

It is generally thought that the *Philebus* was written by Plato after he had composed the *Sophist* and *Statesman*. One might suppose that the shift from Socrates to the Eleatic Stranger as the main protagonist in these two dialogues is a sign of a shift in Plato's doctrines. If this is so, what is the point of the return to Socrates after the complicated discussions carried out under the guidance of the Eleatic Stranger? I have discussed this problem with special attention to the function of the Stranger in my books on the *Sophist* and *Statesman*.³ Here our focus of attention is Socrates. And the first thing to be said is that the Socrates of the *Philebus* seems to have

undergone a modification that brings him closer to (but does not make him identical with) the Eleatic Stranger.

Despite the etymological significance of the name "Philebus" and his physical beauty, which, to anticipate, seems to have a compelling influence upon Protarchus (11c7-8), the usual Socratic emphasis upon Eros, together with a vivid interest in the physical and intellectual attributes of the youths with whom he converses, is missing here. In general, Socrates does not exhibit the kind of playful irony that elsewhere is typical of his interrogative style. Even his use of myth is relatively colorless and is largely devoted to the technical analysis of formal structure. Most striking of all is the fact that Socrates introduces topics of unusual difficulty, which are treated in a most obscure manner, and which have struck most readers of the dialogue as irrelevant, and even as obstacles, to the progress of the main theme. In general, Socrates expresses himself with a degree of obscurity that is entirely inappropriate to the nature of his interlocutors, as well as to the theme of the dialogue, which is that of the good life for all human beings. On this point, it is instructive to compare the *Philebus* to the *Republic*, where Socrates converses with much more gifted and articulate youths (Glaucón and Adeimantus) about a related but much more difficult topic (the dependence of justice upon philosophy and the nature of the philosopher), but in a much more lucid and straightforward manner. And this is true even with respect to his treatment of the doctrine of Ideas and the degrees of cognition, as compared with his presentation of formal analysis and the classification of beings in the *Philebus*.

In short, we might have expected a conversation quite different from the one we actually encounter. Is there a connection between the dramatic and stylistic peculiarities of the *Philebus* and its main theme? I suggest that the key to the solution is the role assigned to Eros in the *Philebus*. Let me first state the general point. The *Philebus* is odd because it discusses the question of the good life in a relatively "nonhuman" way. This is partly due to the nature of pleasure, which according to Philebus is the highest good, and which can be enjoyed "by all animals" (11b4). Socrates opposes to this his own view that thoughtfulness is the highest good,

but he emphasizes throughout the pure cognition of forms (as well as pure or simple pleasures of sense perception), not the general intelligence that could reasonably be associated with the good life. And in his final account of the mixture of qualities or states of the soul that constitute the good life for all human beings, he omits any reference to Eros. No doubt this has something to do with the need to discipline Philebus (via his spokesman, Protarchus). But it is carrying discipline too far to arrive at a paradigm for the good life that is unacceptable to the human race and indeed, that could be adopted only at the price of extinction.

Let us briefly review the references to Eros in the *Philebus*. Sexual eros is mentioned explicitly four times in the dialogue, either in passing or in order to denounce it (most violently at the end: 67b1-5; cf. 23a4, 47e1 and 50e1). There are two very brief references to philosophical Eros, near the beginning and the end of the dialogue, at 16b6 and 58d2-5). They certainly reflect the doctrine of Eros enunciated by Socrates elsewhere, but in passing, as it were by moonlight rather than sunlight. The minimal role assigned to intellectual Eros is certainly connected to the absence in the *Philebus* of any reference to the hyperuranian or trans-ontic Ideas. Sobriety replaces madness. This is especially evident in the treatment of the sexual Eros. It is never defended explicitly by Philebus, despite his loyalty to Aphrodite, and Protarchus, his official spokesman, is soon drawn into violent criticism of the degrading effects of the most intense bodily pleasures, a violence that may indicate bitter experience but which is nevertheless hardly flattering to the goddess of love. It is also noteworthy that here and elsewhere the criticism of sexual pleasure is presented indirectly if unmistakably in the form of a discussion of the base pleasure of scratching an itch or by denouncing the power of intense physical pleasure to make us grunt, gesticulate, and cavort like the beasts, behavior that is so shameful that we hide it in the dark. Most important, however, is the aforementioned fact that sexual pleasure, or for that matter Eros in any form, is not mentioned as an ingredient in the very full articulation of the components in the mixture constituting the good life.

In one of the best-known passages in the *Philebus*, Socrates speaks of "the tragedy and the comedy of human life" (50b1-2).

What one could plausibly call the comic aspects of human life that are due to the bestial Eros, are mitigated in the *Symposium*, *Phaedrus*, and *Republic* by the intercession of the philosophical or divine Eros. In the *Philebus*, this mitigation does not take place. Differently stated, Socratic mania is replaced by technical eccentricity. There is no doubt that this eccentricity is muffled in the much more conventional closing section of the dialogue, which emphasizes measure, harmony, and moderation. But the muffling or muting that is apparently appropriate to the life of human beings in general is tragic precisely because we are denied access to the divine madness that raises us beyond ourselves and could thereby be said to constitute our ladder to the good. There is something soporific about the good life of the *Philebus*.

The difficulties associated with Eros are connected to the fact that spiritedness (*thumos*) makes a very restricted appearance in the *Philebus*. If I am not mistaken, this word occurs only twice, both times in the sense of "anger" (40e3, 47e6). If we think of the political role assigned to spiritedness in the *Republic*, the further thought occurs to us that the good life in the *Philebus* is oddly apolitical. It is part of the soporific nature of the good life that it lacks political ambition. But this lack makes it all the more necessary to mute the passions and desires, since in their full form, they cannot be controlled by the intellect alone. A soul produced by a mixture of thoughtfulness and pleasure, however symmetrical the measures, is unbalanced. The central role assigned to arithmetic and formal analysis, which is reflected in the analytical approach to the elements of the good life, together with the ridicule heaped upon Eros and Aphrodite, all conspire to produce a model that is peculiarly unsuited to its addressees, despite the veil of edifying rhetoric in which it is wrapped.

I have been suggesting that the need to punish and suppress Eros accounts for, or more cautiously, is associated with the relative lack of dramatic detail and the abruptness of the beginning of the dialogue. The treatment of the good life is strangely isolated from the context of life itself. It must now be added that this abruptness constitutes a dramatic artifice in its own right. The artifice, however,

works retroactively. We come to see that Socrates has fashioned his speeches in such a way as to punish Philebus. In the *Republic*, the extremely erotic Glaucon is not disciplined so much as he is transformed or raised to the level of philosophical Eros. In the *Philebus*, it is almost as if Plato splits Glaucon in half, assigning the erotic component to Philebus and the delight in dialectical conversation to Protarchus. Once he is deprived of Eros, Protarchus becomes very quickly immune to the compulsion of Philebus' beauty, and Socrates has no difficulty in converting him to the principle of thoughtfulness. At the same time, by calling the dialogue *Philebus* rather than *Protarchus*, Plato sends us a clear signal that the silence of Eros continues to be present. We are led to wonder whether Protarchus will continue to celebrate thoughtfulness when Socrates finally departs.

My suggestion about Eros has a second component that is much more speculative than the first. I suspect that the behavior of Socrates in the *Philebus* is intended by Plato as a kind of satirical comment on the limitations of the philosophical approach of the Eleatic Stranger. Very far from employing the Eleatic Stranger as a symbol of a new stage in his own philosophy, Plato presents us with several different paradigms of the philosophical nature. In the *Philebus*, Plato shows us what would happen if Socrates were to have fallen under the influence of the Stranger's methods. The satire would not work if Socrates became a simple copy of the Stranger. It owes its bite to the comic results of attempting to pursue Socratic ends in a manner influenced by the Stranger, or what the Stranger represents for philosophical method. I cannot prove the soundness of this suggestion, but it fits the facts both of the *Philebus* and the nature of dramatic writing. Plato presents us with the many sides of the philosophical nature. These sides are not totally disparate, but they are less unified than is believed by those who speak regularly of "Platonism" and more unified than is implied by schemata of the early, middle, and late Plato.

II

The words do not appear explicitly, but the first line of the *Philebus* could be understood to resonate with a famous Socratic expression:

palin eks arches ("once more from the beginning"). Our beginning is not that of the dramatic encounter between Socrates and his subsequent interlocutors, or the still more artificial device of the prologue in which someone recollects a past conversation. It is not even the abrupt beginning of a discussion of some problem but rather the indication that we have reached an impasse in an ongoing dispute and the suggestion that a restatement of principles would be helpful. The dialogue thus begins *in medias res*, but not simply by inserting us into the flow of ongoing action. We begin with an invocation of memory. In the last exchange of the dialogue (67b10–13), Protarchus denies Socrates' request to allow him to depart. "There is still a little bit left [to discuss]...and I will remind you [*hupomnēsō*] of the remainder." The conversation as we witness it is thus contained between two exercises of the memory, the second of which is the basis for an anticipation of future discussion. In the middle of the dialogue (33c8), Socrates introduces the problem of memory (*mnēmē*), which, together with anticipation, plays the crucial role in providing the continuity of conscious life.

The initial peculiarity of the abrupt beginning of the *Philebus* is mitigated by our perception of the structural role assigned to memory and its corollary, anticipation. These two mental powers are directed to the past and the future, respectively. What remains to be explained is how their combined activity produces the present. The dramatic structure of the dialogue thus exhibits what will become one of the most difficult problems in the dialogue, a problem that is discussed only indirectly, and indeed, that is presented rather than analyzed. This is the problem of human temporality, and in particular of the "lived present," as I shall call it. The "intermediate" nature of the dramatic presentation in the *Philebus* corresponds to the intermediateness of the lived present between the past and the future. Plato does not present us with a theory or phenomenological description of human temporality; he exhibits dramatically our fragile purchase on the present.

The curtain rises and we are presented with an adult, whom we have reason to assume will be the hero of the play, talking to two youths. One of them, Philebus, has just finished defending a

position that, for some reason, is about to be taken up by the other, Protarchus, or "first principle." "Socrates," incidentally, could be translated as "strong savior." With whom is Protarchus disputing? Socrates says "with us" but this could be a figure of speech that means "with me." We shall see later that the number of those in attendance is more than two. The dyad of Philebus and Protarchus is in fact only the surface of an indeterminate collection of youths. But the Socratic monad is also indeterminate; by saying "we," Socrates at least implies that he is not the only person present who advocates thoughtfulness as the best life. The point of this joke is that from the outset, the *Philebus* is an imprecise treatment of precision. This will become evident as the conversation unfolds. We do not know exactly how many are involved in the discussion, or who beside Philebus has already contributed to it, perhaps in support of Socrates, or where it is taking place. We are also dependent upon Socrates for an account of what was previously said, although we can be partly reassured by the fact that neither Protarchus nor Philebus objects to his report. And a detailed analysis of the technical passages will exhibit the same systematic imprecision, camouflaged as the invocation to precision.

This imprecision is also exhibited by the terminology applied by Socrates to express the two competing accounts of the good life. There is a rather precise difference between the two principles invoked, yet there is also a fluctuation bordering upon ambiguity in the terms used to formulate these principles. Socrates first states the *logos* of Philebus, according to whom, he says, "good is what is enjoyable (*to chairein*) to all living beings; [it is] both pleasure and delight (*ten hedonen kai terpsin*), and whatever is harmonious (*sumphōna*) with this genus" (11b4–6). He then repeats "our *logos*...that thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory (*to phronein kai to noein kai memnēsthai*) and things of the same genus, both correct opinion and true calculations (*doksan te orthēn kai aletheis logismous*), are better and superior to pleasure for all things able to partake of them" (11b6).

It has been regularly noted that Socrates, in speaking of Philebus' thesis, uses *agathon* ("good") without an article.⁴ Most commentators

take the bare word to be equivalent in sense to "the good." I see no reason why Plato could not have added the article, had he wished to convey its meaning. We see here the first instance of the corollary to the imprecise presentation of precision, namely, a precise, that is, intentional, use of imprecision. The context does not make clear whether Socrates is speaking of "good," "a good," or "the good." This vagueness is appropriate to the initial formulation of the question as attributed to Philebus: What is good for all animals (*pasi zōiois*)? As we shall see, Socrates varies his terms considerably in discussing the instances of goodness, both here and in the last section of the dialogue. Nevertheless, as the conversation unfolds, there can be no doubt that the issue in dispute is the identity of "the" good for all human beings, or in other words, for human beings in general. The ambiguity leads us to ask what the argument would look like if we accepted multiple goods corresponding to different types of human being. These would still have to be rank-ordered, but on what principle? And whatever the principle, would it not itself be "good" in some sense higher than that attributed to the elements in the rank-ordering? In the *Republic*, the Idea of the good serves as such a first principle. There is no such first principle in the *Philebus*. Or stated more cautiously, in the final blending of the good life, thoughtfulness drops to third place whereas measure wins first prize. It is also true that thoughtfulness is much closer to measure than is pleasure, but the upshot of the long analysis is to promote attributes that remind us of practical intelligence, not goodness in any ontological sense.

Socrates uses three names to characterize Philebus' claim about the good: enjoyment, pleasure, and delight, which he says represent a genus or set of terms. "What is enjoyable to all animals" is replaced a few lines later by "pleasure." In both places it is evident that the expression is not restricted to human beings but connects them together with all animals. It is obvious that what is enjoyable to one species need not be pleasant for another, but the *logos* of Philebus is apparently indifferent to differentia; whatever any animal enjoys is good because it is pleasant. We can see at the outset that Philebus abolishes the most important distinction between

humans and brutes. Otherwise stated, the brutes can live as good a life as human beings.

In order to summarize "our" principle, Socrates requires five terms. Thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory are a kind of response to enjoyment, pleasure, and delight. The latter triad is harmonious with other attributes of the same genus. But the genus containing the cognitive attributes also contains attributes that are the result of the activity of thoughtfulness, intelligence, and memory, namely, correct opinion and true calculation. Whereas these last two are "harmonious" with the first three, they are also not homogeneous with them but of a higher order of complexity. Enjoyment issues in versions of itself, namely, in a sensation or feeling. But cognition issues in *logos*, that is, in assertions that are true or false, or more broadly expressed, in opinions and judgments that might be true or false. Socrates qualifies opinion as "correct" and calculation as "true." Incorrect opinions and false calculations are not part of the good. In sum: if the pleasant is the good, then this includes all pleasures. But if thinking or cognition is the good, this does not include all thoughts. We therefore see that cognition (as I am labeling the genus for convenience) is not unqualifiedly the good but is itself subordinate to truth and correctness. One small point: "correct" (*orthēn*) is normally associated with "calculation" and "true" with opinion or belief. Here the linkages are reversed.

We should also note that in the third line of the dialogue, Socrates asks Protarchus whether he agrees with the *logos* of Philebus. The Greek phrase translated by "agrees" is *kata noun*, literally, "in accord with your intellect" (11b1).⁵ Strictly speaking, the game is up for Philebus after the recapitulation of positions, which itself depends upon *logos* and *nous*, or in other words, cognition. One might wish to argue that human beings would be better off if they lacked cognition but were in a state of continuous sensory pleasure. Socrates will later claim that if we are not aware that we are pleased, then we cannot know that we are living the good life. This seems uncontroversial, but it does not entirely refute the thesis that one can live the good life without knowing it. A somewhat different but not unrelated question is whether one can be mistaken about what one

regards as the good life. The political dimension of the so-called quarrel between the ancients and the moderns depends upon the answer to this question.

Something has to be said about the terms employed by Socrates in speaking of "our good." *To phronein* means thoughtfulness, but in the Socratic school the intrinsic conception of wisdom is associated with prudence or sound judgment and culminates in Aristotle's sense of practical intelligence (*phronēsis*).⁶ The second term, *to noein*, refers in general to intellectual perception; it is used more particularly to connote considering, understanding, and devising a complex plan. In Plato, the characteristic meaning is that of pure thinking, as in *noēsis*, the apprehension of pure forms or formal structure. *To phronein* and *to noein* may thus be taken as an informal representation of practical and theoretical intelligence. As is usually the case in Plato, there is no third term corresponding to the Aristotelian *poiein* or *poiēsis*, "making" or "productive intelligence." This is connected to the absence of any reference to *technē*, which is normally associated by Socrates with *epistēmē* or knowledge, and hence with thoughtfulness. We should however note that at 62d1-e1, Socrates and Protarchus agree to include "all the sciences" (*pasas tas epistēmas*) into the blend constituting the good life. This agreement is amplified at 66b8-c2 to include the *technai*. Finally, *memnēsthai*, "to remember," has the essential power of detaching perceptions and cognitions from erasure by the flow of time, and holding them before the mind's eye as it opines or calculates. In a very real sense, human life transpires within, and is unified by, the memory. One could say that memory is accordingly both theoretical and practico-productive. It constructs experience and thereby renders it cognitively accessible.

In sum: we remember the formal structures that make cognition possible, including the cognition of the superiority of a life of thinking to that of a life of pleasure. We cannot "forget" these structures because we must verify them independently each time that we think them. This superiority of the theoretical life will hold good for all of our ostensibly multiple personalities. The entire thrust of the philosophy of the Socratic school is precisely to move away from

what is today called self-consciousness, and precisely because it is internally incoherent.

If I may interpolate a historical remark on this point, critics of Plato like Nietzsche have correctly discerned an ambiguity, if not indeed an inner incoherence, in Platonism. Philosophy, or the highest human life, has as its goal death to this world, or access to a state of impersonal, and hence not at all self-conscious, viewing of pure forms. Nietzsche's attack on Platonism leads unfortunately to the radical dissolution of self-consciousness, to its dissociation into the multiple perspectives or points of view that are exactly analogous to the discontinuities of personal identity established by modern analytical philosophy. We should ponder deeply the fact that the extraordinary technical proficiency of modern logical and conceptual analysis has not only failed to avoid, but if anything has accelerated the contemporary triumph of Nietzsche's fundamental theoretical axiom that chaos is at the heart of all things. The problem, however, is not simply that most modern philosophers reject the Platonic doctrine of Ideas. In fact, as I have argued elsewhere, one can arrive at approximately the same result by a doctrine of concepts. But what no doctrine of formal intelligibility can supply by itself is the principle of Eros. We are unified by our love of formal intelligibility, and not simply by love or by formal intelligibility alone.

To return to Socrates' terminology, *doxa* means generally belief or opinion, a view that may or may not correspond to the facts, but that could be confirmed or denied by recourse to what is actually the case. We may not have access to the actual; *doxa* is rooted in what seems to me or to us to be true or correct. It is in other words rooted in *phainomena* in the sense of what seems to be such-and-such, not in the sense of what points itself out as what it is. By using the term "correct" to modify *doxa*, Socrates implicitly assimilates it into *logismos*. We determine whether or not our beliefs are truly arrived at by subjecting them to calculation in the sense of considering the elements and relations that constitute their structure, that is, the structure that purports to be intrinsic to things as they are. This is not entirely satisfactory, since, as I noted above, "correct" is more easily applied to calculations than to beliefs

or opinions. Still, the present use is entirely intelligible and not unheard of. Today we speak of "politically correct" opinions.

A while ago I observed that Socrates does not allude to *poiein*, "making" as associated with the arts. He also omits to mention the imagination or fantasy, a faculty that plays an important role in Aristotle's account of cognition. *Aisthēsis* (sense perception) is not mentioned in the initial account of Philebus' *logos*, but this can be explained by the fact that Socrates lists modalities of enjoyment, not the faculties through which enjoyment is obtained. In stating his own position, on the contrary, he lists faculties of cognition as well as their characteristic results. And this raises a further point. Pleasure, enjoyment, delight, and so on, are what we may call states of the organism. To enjoy is to feel in a certain condition; the condition is so fundamental that it is difficult to analyze or restate it in still better-understood expressions. Thinking and its various related terms are not conditions of the organism but faculties or powers that produce, or may produce, conditions such as pleasure or pain, and which certainly produce opinions and calculations.

In addition to this lack of symmetry, one may also suggest that pleasure is more immediate and in most persons more seductive than cognition. One has only to think of sexual pleasure to see the point. Even the desire for knowledge that Aristotle attributes to all human beings is satisfied in the first instance, like all desires, by the pleasure derived from knowing, not from the knowing itself. Pleasure is self-recommending and is in no way dependent upon *logos* to make it desirable. In order to establish that thoughtfulness is better than the pleasure it conveys, one has to think rather than to enjoy. This is one of the implications of the relative silence of Philebus, which, after the initial scene, is broken only three times (18a1-e7, 22c3-4 and 27e7). In order to refute Protarchus (and Philebus), Socrates must insist that thoughtfulness is superior to pleasure altogether. That this is not entirely persuasive is shown by the aforementioned suggestion. This is why we require a mixed life; thoughtfulness is intrinsically pleasant. Otherwise put, the process of considering thoughtfulness and pleasure separately, as though they were paradigms of actual lives, is incoherent.

Socrates rounds off the account of his own *logos* of the good by stating that it is most useful for all those, living and as yet unborn, who are able to participate (*metaschein*) in it (11c1-3).⁷ This requires two comments. First: the statement seems to show what has sometimes been criticized as the utilitarian element in Socrates' ethical doctrine. But the usefulness to which he refers is not ethical in the usual sense of the practical virtues. We would be better advised to speak here of ontological utility. Our goal is to select the best life, not to engage in a particular act of justice, temperance, or some other moral attribute. We are therefore concerned with principles that possess practico-productive efficacy, namely, that will issue in one kind of life or another. Lacking that efficacy, a principle would be useless in the present context. The principle is useful for the acquisition or living of the life. This is not at all to define the goodness of the life, or of any particular act within it, in terms of its utility. But we can go one step farther. The cosmos is not a totality of homogeneous and neutral monads but a harmony or communion of reciprocally enabling natures. Every being is useful to the establishment of the identity and the exercise of the powers of other beings. In every case we are able to say "this is good for that." I believe that this insight underlies the decision to call the highest principle in the *Republic* the Idea of the good. The real weakness in the Platonic analysis lies not with the link between utility and goodness but with uselessness and harmfulness or evil. Whereas this may be good for that, it is also bad for something else. The attempt by the tradition descending via Aristotle from the Socratic school to define evil as a privation is entirely unsatisfactory. I cannot develop this point here because it is dependent upon a discussion of negation and non-being. For the moment it will suffice to say that privation is too empty a concept to do justice to the positive harm of evil.

The second comment is with respect to the verb *metaschein*, "to participate." This verb may remind us of the famous doctrine of Ideas, which does not seem to be present in the *Philebus* in its traditional version. Some would say that in the later dialogues, Plato abandons the thesis of the Ideas. But this way of formulating the issue assumes that the dialogues are historical documents or a

chronology of Plato's philosophical career. Suffice it to say that in the *Philebus*, by accepting Socrates' account of the good, we participate, not in an Idea, but in what looks very much like a definition or concept.

To continue, Protarchus unreservedly accepts Socrates' summary of the dispute to this point. He is then asked by his interlocutor whether he will receive the *logos* that Philebus has turned over to him. Protarchus replies: "I must receive it, for it has been renounced by the beautiful Philebus" (11c2-8). What precisely does this mean? If Philebus were not beautiful, would Protarchus feel the same compulsion? Or is he simply taking up the defense of a common principle that his ally has deserted? We should look ahead to 19c4-5, where Protarchus will say that it was Socrates who "gave freely, that is to say, bestowed upon those present," the *sunousia* or community of discussion. *Sunousia* is one of those polyvalent terms that can mean sexual union, a gathering of friends, or ontological unity. However we take it, Socrates is evidently the founder of the "being together" that underlies the conversation. He is the principle of unity, which Philebus, through his silence, threatens to disrupt. Note that the disrupting factor is not the disagreement about principles; this is instead the underlying cause of the conversation. In addition, there is at least a hint of another unifying factor: the beauty of Philebus.

The dialogue begins with a hint that Protarchus has chosen his principle under the compulsion of Eros. As a result of the main part of the conversation, he is won over by Socrates to the attractiveness of intelligence, and so to the mixture of cognition and pleasure. At the end of the dialogue (67b10), Socrates will ask to be released from the discussion, but is denied permission by Protarchus, who says that there are still one or two points to clear up. We move from a free gift, and so a voluntary association, through the various stages of discursive compulsion. The beauty of Philebus, and so Eros, plays an imprecise role in the early stages of this compulsion. Socrates was free to begin the investigation of the good life, but he is not free to terminate it. By coming before the public, philosophy acquires public obligations. A private conversation about the good

life is not the same as a discussion about the public good, but it carries an analogous commitment of responsibility.

In this light, the next exchange between Socrates and Protarchus is quite interesting. The philosopher asks: "must we not acquire in every way the truth about these things?" Protarchus agrees: "we must" (11c9-d1). The compulsion of *sunousia* is dual. Let us say that Protarchus has been implicated in the present community by two kinds of pleasure, one emanating from the beauty of Philebus and the other from his own desire to know, or at least to engage in philosophical discussion. Human beings are brought together by Eros and *logos*. Perhaps Protarchus wished originally to shine in the eyes of Philebus; no matter, he is now learning from his own situation the force of *logos*. But there is no reason to see here a radical shift from one principle to another. The main theme of the dialogue is the impossibility of a radical separation between pleasure and cognition. Otherwise put, there can be no doubt that the boys are enjoying the conversation; even Philebus' silence is not the same as leaving the company. He intends to make a point by his silence, not to dissolve the *sunousia*. This is why he will eventually be reintegrated into the discourse. Philebus is not genuinely silent; he is posturing, advertising the strength of his conviction. And this is a quasi-speech. Only something in particular can be deprived of a property. So too only someone who speaks through his silence can take a stand with respect to the discourse of another. Only someone whose silence means something can be taken into account in a dispute. Philebus' silence, while it lasts, is the reiteration of his principle and the attempted demonstration of the superiority of silent pleasure to the speech of *logos*. The thematic suppression of Eros is thus accompanied by a silent demonstration of its force.

Appropriately enough, Socrates says that we have each agreed to make visible (*apophainein*) "a habit and condition of the soul" (*hexis* and *diathesis* are central notions in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*) that is capable of furnishing a blessed life to all human beings (11d2-6).⁸ The implication is that what is hidden or invisible in itself must be made visible by discourse. Strictly speaking, this is not true

of pleasure, which, as we have established, can be enjoyed silently. But cognition depends upon *logos*; if there is a cognitive habit of the soul, it cannot be silently felt. We become aware of it only through its own activity, and this of course includes speaking to oneself. As should have been obvious from the first moment of the dialogue, it will be impossible for pleasure to defeat *logos* in argument. But neither can pleasure secure a complete victory by total silence, since this is tantamount to the complete absence of the soul from itself.

We were initially said to have been looking for what is good for all living beings, or at least for those who are capable of participating in cognition and pleasure. Socrates now associates the preferred habit or disposition of the soul with "the blessed life." *Eudaimonia* means prosperity, good fortune, extreme happiness, and cumulatively, the fullest share of these blessings. The literal sense of the word is "good daimon." The blessed life raises us above the merely human, but not to the level of the fully divine. Protarchus does not require a technical definition of a term in common use. Blessedness is a habit or condition of the soul, not an action or even a propensity to act toward others in such and such a manner, but a self-perfection. As is well-known, Kant criticizes the ancients for their Eudaemonist ethics, which he regards as immoral or conducive to selfishness. It seems that Kant's standards are even higher than those of Holy Scripture, which speaks of salvation and blessedness in addition to the performance of good deeds. Surely it is impossible to know that one is saved without feeling intense pleasure or joy. Whatever Kant would say to this, he is correct on one point. Blessedness is not other-directed, and it is inseparable from the enjoyment of extreme happiness (if one can even distinguish, except perhaps in degrees of intensity, between enjoyment and happiness). This is of course not to suggest that blessed persons do not perform virtuous deeds. But they may not, unless they are convinced that the performance of such deeds is useful to the strengthening or maintaining of their blessedness. This reinforces my previous observation that the utility of the highest principle is ontological rather than ethical. It defines how we must be, that is, what is the state or condition of the soul that leads to our personal blessedness.

Socrates now identifies the two competing habits of the soul as enjoyment (*tou chairein*) and thoughtfulness (*tou phronein*). These were the first terms in the previous fuller statement of the rival theses. In his next speech, Socrates refers to pleasure (*hēdonē*) rather than to enjoyment, but retains thoughtfulness (11e1–12a1). The contraction and the substitution are first steps in what will become a rather confusing variation of key terms. One thing is plain: Socrates does not find it necessary to proceed from careful definitions of the main concepts of the conversation. He proceeds instead by the method of substitution of equivalents. We will have to be alert to these ostensible equivalences, in order to make sure that Socrates arrives at a coherent conception of blessedness. The justification for his method is that all discussions of the good life proceed on the basis of already known terms, and so by reference to states or habits of the soul that are better known than any technical analysis of them. One might very well be able to achieve precise definitions of enjoyment and thoughtfulness, but these would then become part of an artificial language detached from human life. When the discussion shifts, as it will very shortly, to quite abstract topics like dividing and collecting formal elements or categorizing every being in the sum of things (*panta ta nun onta en toi panti*: 23c4), Socrates will be a bit more careful in his terminology, but not much more. So even Socrates' ontology (as I somewhat apologetically persist in calling it) is rooted in the everyday and already known.

III

We recall that at 11d4, Socrates introduced the terms "habit" (*hexsis*) and "disposition" (*diathesis*). These terms are almost synonymous; perhaps we may distinguish them as follows. A disposition is a consequence of a habit. And habits are produced by repetition or training. In the *Republic*, for example, intelligence must have trained, and so persuaded spiritedness to enforce its rule over the passions. This is the habit of virtue, which induces in us dispositions to act in this or that virtuous manner. More important for us is the relation between *phronēsis* or thoughtfulness and *sōphrosunē*: temperance or moderation. The temperate soul is in proper balance or has

been habituated to possess the disposition of the right measure, to employ a term that will figure prominently at a later stage of the discussion. A soul that is correctly measured has all of its parts in harmony. *Phronesis* thus leads by way of moderation to measure and harmony, or to what one might call ethical arithmetic. This is the counterpart to the eidetic arithmetic that is introduced with respect to formal structure. Eidetic arithmetic divides and collects, whereas ethical arithmetic rearranges or reorders. The relation between ethical and eidetic arithmetic constitutes the basis for the connection between the good life and cognition. It remains to be seen whether Philebus and Protarchus need to know this, or indeed, whether Socrates actually explains it to them.

The topic under immediate discussion is not simply one of analytical structure but of what Nietzsche calls "rank-ordering." Our goal is to establish the generally best life, namely, the life that is best for all those living creatures that can participate in it. But this life need not be best in itself. There may be an intrinsically superior life that is accessible only to a few living beings. Socrates does not proceed by examining sample lives but rather by the analysis of competing principles. It would take too long to pursue the former path, nor could we in fact succeed without first having agreed upon the order of principles. It has been the upshot of the opening conversation (as we know it) that there are two principles, pleasure and thoughtfulness. But now the question arises: how do we know this? Why could there not be three, four, or five principles? There is no deduction of our two principles from a higher or transcendental principle, in the Kantian style that has been so influential in modern philosophy. The situation is exactly the same here as in the case of the Platonic Ideas or the Aristotelian categories. The relevant items are introduced into the discussion with little or no justification. The implication is that they are obvious, directly furnished by our pre-philosophical experience. Only then does the technical analysis or theory-construction get under way. And how could it be otherwise? We cannot begin with a theoretical construction of the foundation of experience, because theory is always based upon pre-theoretical experience. We cannot completely replace pre-theoretical experience

with a formal construction, because then philosophy would not be about life, or for that matter about anything except itself. It would be a formal calculus or technical game.

Socrates acknowledges that there may be another habit of the soul that is stronger than pleasure or thoughtfulness and so defeats both in the struggle for dominance in the rank-ordering of principles. Furthermore, if that third state should be related either to thoughtfulness or pleasure, then the compound will be superior to the remaining candidate (11d11–12a5). I note in passing that the task of rank-ordering lives is agonistic; here as elsewhere, Plato uses images of hunting, wrestling, boxing, and war to illustrate philosophical investigation. This has something to do with the erotic nature of the soul.

Let us make a preliminary reflection on the Socratic proposal to examine separately states like thoughtfulness and pleasure. If this proposal is feasible, it should be possible to be continuously pleased without remembering that we were previously pleased or anticipating that we will continue in this state. This is required by the fact that memory falls under thoughtfulness, as does anticipation of the future. The autonomy of pleasure thus rests upon a peculiar type of consciousness that is not cognitive and therefore cannot even be reflexive in the proper sense. We cannot formulate the statement "I am being pleased." In sum, we do not know that we are now being pleased, which is to say that past, present, and future all drop away. The remainder, if it is thinkable at all, is a curious sort of sentience that mimics eternity. This thought-experiment is enough, I believe, to establish the absurdity of the notion of a life of pure pleasure, which would not be a life at all. We would subsist, like a rock, with the single difference that we would be enjoying our rocklike homogeneity.

Now let us consider a life of pure thoughtfulness, to which no pleasure at all is attached. Here it is initially more difficult to know how to proceed. Why could we not spend our time in perpetual cognition, preserving the past in memory and projecting the future via anticipation? I see no conceptual incoherence in this hypothesis; it is not logically impossible. But it suffers from an obvious

deficiency. It is not a human life, and so it is on a par with the life of pure pleasure.

It is unnecessary to pursue these examples further. They show us that there is something artificial about the attempt to consider principles like thoughtfulness and pleasure in complete independence of any others. By this I do not mean merely that Socrates will eventually arrive at a mixed life or some combination of thoughtfulness and pleasure. I mean instead that Socrates, like us, begins from such a mixture. It is only a being of such a mixed nature that would be capable of entering into an investigation like that conducted in the *Philebus*. This places a restriction on the use of counterfactual conditionals, so popular in contemporary philosophy of mind, for our own reflection on the best life. We are not engaged in the study of the logical independence of possible states, like mentation or pleasure, but rather in the pursuit of the best life. To make this point in another way, the philosophy of mind is a denatured or attenuated version of the Socratic investigation into states of the soul. The philosophy of mind begins from the tacit rejection of the soul, and with its replacement by the modern concepts of mind and body. In other words, it is no longer concerned with the question of the best way of life, which has been excluded from philosophy as reconceived in the image of modern science. Late modern philosophy separates the conceptual analysis of properties and relations from a reflection on the continuity or wholeness of life, and so of course from the question of the best life. We are thus mutilated or divided against ourselves from the outset of our attempts to investigate ourselves.

Plato's *Philebus* cannot be understood on the basis of the two modern paradigms of conceptual analysis or the philosophy of life. These paradigms arise from the modern conception of reason as fundamentally mathematical or analytical, a paradigm that the philosophers of life accept in their very rebellion against rationalism and recourse to intuition, feeling, sympathy, and so on. The Platonic starting-point is the indispensability of the sense of wholeness of the diverse dimensions of human existence, a sense of wholeness that is furnished by everyday life. I say *starting-point*, because of course,

as thoughtful animals, we cannot avoid reflecting upon the diversity of the elements that constitute human nature, as well as the conflicts and even incoherencies that mark their relations. It is our initial wholeness that initiates or is the ground for our feeling that we are "falling apart" or that we suffer from conflicts and inner diremptions that threaten to destroy us.

For a Platonist, then, it is not a serious problem that we cannot establish conceptually the continuity of self-identity. If we begin by separating concepts or thoughts from the existential unity of human life, the remainder is temporality or the flow of genesis, held together by nothing other than spatial sequence. Dissolution is thus effected by the very formulation of the problem of self-identity. This is not very interesting, even when it is expressed with the full regalia of logic and set-theory. What is interesting is the unified creature who is engaged in the analytical enterprise of self-dissolution. The focus is on the best life, not on the logical or conceptual coherence of the counterfactual conditional of the thoughtless life of pleasure or the life of pure thought that lacks all pleasure. More precisely, the focus is on the rank-ordering of pleasure and thoughtfulness in human life, and not on two separate lives, one of pure pleasure and the other of pure thought. This is precisely the conclusion at which Socrates arrives. What I wish to emphasize is that he arrives there only because this was also his starting-point.

I have anticipated the sequence of events in the dialogue in order to give a coherent picture of the general context. We have reached 12a6, where Philebus asserts that he believes and will continue to believe that pleasure triumphs entirely over thoughtfulness. It should now be clear that the only possibility for retaining this belief is by refusing to engage in its investigation, or in other words, by lapsing into silence. And in fact Philebus turns over the defense of their common principle to Protarchus. The new spokesman notes that Philebus is no longer master of the decision whether or not to agree with the *logos* of Socrates. Philebus replies: "You speak the truth. I swear it and invoke the goddess as witness" (12b1-2). He does not intend by these words to sacrifice his belief (*dokei kai doksei*: "it seems to me and will seem to me"), which, as reinforced

by the oath, is for him stronger than *logos*. I note that Philebus does not say "it has seemed to me." In other words, he does not refer to memory or recollection. The past is of less importance than the present and the future to partisans of pleasure.

I take this passage to mean also that the speech of belief is stronger than the speech of rational argumentation, and that belief is represented by the testimony of silence. A refusal to debate is not the same as an acknowledgment of inferiority. Is this enough? One could say that Philebus is permitted to enjoy the conversation without understanding it, in the sense that he does not see the validity of the Socratic refutation of his principle. But some cognition must ensue, since the enjoyment of failing to see that one has been refuted rests upon a misunderstanding of the Socratic argument, and misunderstanding is a form of understanding. Philebus does not lose consciousness or disappear into a sea of pleasure, as is obvious from his subsequent re-entry into the discussion. The symbolic or silent speech of Philebus is thus a testimony to the impossibility of sundering the two principles of thoughtfulness and pleasure while retaining a human life. It is not a sign that pleasure can triumph over thoughtfulness by remaining silent. Genuine silence is not triumph but death, and death is not the best life for human beings. That Philebus does not choose death is clear from his oath to the goddess, identified by Socrates at 12b7 as Aphrodite.

One more supplementary remark: In the *Republic*, Book IX (580d1 ff., 581c3 ff.), Socrates says explicitly that each part of the soul (intellect, spiritedness, desire) has its particular pleasure, for the sake of which it does its work. This is fundamental to the present investigation, not because the argument in the *Philebus* depends upon the argument in the *Republic*, but because both dialogues depend upon human nature. All men desire by nature to know because it is pleasant to know. Socrates makes the further claim (as would Aristotle) that those who are capable of the best form of thinking experience the purest and best pleasure. As I mentioned above, this is not the same argument as the claim in the *Philebus* that thoughtfulness or cognition is superior to pleasure altogether. But it has to be kept in mind by the reader of the *Philebus*.

So much for our inspection of the opening exchanges in the *Philebus*, or rather of the bridge from Philebus to Protarchus, the new master of the *logos* of pleasure.

Notes

- 1 J. C. B. Gosling, *Philebus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), ad 12a7. Seth Benardete, *The Tragedy and Comedy of Life* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1993) translates "lover of youth."
- 2 In principle, I agree with J. B. Bury, *The Philebus of Plato, edited with introduction, notes and appendices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1897), ad 11a1.
- 3 *Plato's Sophist: The Drama of Original and Appearance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983) and *Plato's Statesman: The Web of Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).
- 4 Bury (*op. cit.*, ad 11b6) initially takes the omission of the article as intentional: "In this dialogue Plato is nothing if not exact." In a subsequent additional note (215), he retracts this view and agrees that *agathon* is here equivalent to *tagathon* (with which R. Hackforth, *Plato's Examination of Pleasure* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1945] and Gosling, *op. cit.*, concur). Benardete is more cautious and notes that the absence of the article may indicate "that the argument is tightened and restructured with the replacement of Philebus by Protarchus" (ad 11b, note 4). I agree that the article is omitted intentionally for reasons explained in the text.
- 5 Benardete (92 *et passim*) is especially acute on this phrase.
- 6 Benardete warns us not to take *phronēsis* as "thoughtfulness" in the Aristotelian sense (ad 11b, n. 5). The warning is sound, but it is not alleviated by using the English word "thought." This implies, or could imply, that *phronēsis* is synonymous with *nous* or *noein*.
- 7 See Benardete, note 7 ad 11c, for an alternative translation that does not, however, bear upon the substance of the passage.
- 8 Bury has a valuable note to 11d5; the key point is that "*heksis* differs from *diathesis* as 'enduring state' from 'transient condition'."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Technē and the Origins of Modernity

I

In this essay, I make a suggestion about the role of Platonism in the development of the modern epoch.¹ It has become quite common to find in the scholarly literature the claim that such originators of modernity as Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, and Descartes were influenced by Plato's geometrical cosmology. According to this view, the mythical description of the cosmos as constructed from a variety of pure geometrical figures, which Plato records in the *Timaeus*, is the prototype for the late Renaissance and early modern conviction that philosophy is written in the book of nature in the languages of mathematics.

This language, as Galileo puts it, consists in characters that are triangles, circles, and other geometrical figures.² Those who, like Ernst Cassirer, Alexandre Koyré, and E. A. Burtt, see in this and similar texts the influence of Platonic metaphysics on the founders of modernity take the passage just cited to refer to the presupposition of a mathematical ontology. The ontological thesis has been challenged by other scholars, among them Stillman Drake and, more recently, Gary Hatfield.

Drake denies that Galileo's science owes anything to the philosophers: "All the documents from his early years at Padua indicate his interest in technological rather than philosophical questions."³ Hatfield contends that Galileo alludes not to a mathematical ontology but to those properties of natural beings that lend themselves to scientific knowledge: "Mathematics is the language, not of the universe, but of philosophy."⁴ Hatfield buttresses his interpretation by citing the *Letter on Sunspots*, in which Galileo tells us to "forsake essences and focus on geometrical properties."⁵ This disagreement between the two sets of scholars suggests that Galileo was either a theoretical Platonist

or a practical engineer and scientist for whom philosophy was of interest, if at all, from an epistemological rather than a Platonist standpoint. This disagreement may be generalized over most if not all of the founders of modernity.⁶ The alternative is theoretical Platonism or an apparently un-Platonic empiricism, with the latter connected to a mathematical epistemology.

My suggestion leaves this controversy unresolved. It is designed instead to broaden the perspective within which we attempt to account for the origins of modernity. The suggestion is this: Whether or not Galileo and the other founders of modernity were theoretical Platonists, their emphasis on production is entirely compatible with the Platonic dialogues. In a somewhat more elaborate form, I suggest that the difference between Plato and Aristotle with respect to the classification of the arts and sciences has a role to play in the background to the emergence of the modern epoch.

This course leads me to deny, or at least to qualify, the customary opposition, as stated by Koyré, that whereas mathematical physics finds its ancestry in Plato, the claim that physics is built directly upon experience and sense perception is Aristotelian.⁷ I am not proposing to deny the link between Aristotle and scientific empiricism. The difference between Plato and Aristotle that interests me here does not concern the role of experience in natural science but rather the relation of production to practice.

II

In the Platonic dialogues, we regularly find classifications of the arts and sciences in terms of whether or not they issue in the production of a separate artifact. Such sciences as arithmetic and geometry produce nothing but discover the natures of mathematical beings; following Plato's terminology, let me call these the theoretical or "acquisitive" sciences. Other forms of knowledge lead to the production of artifacts, as in the case of such arts as carpentry and shoemaking. Plato calls these the "productive" *technai*.

As is obvious from the distinction between theory and production, the Platonic dialogues do not distinguish a third group of practical arts and sciences. Plato does not group ethics and politics

as a distinct family that is neither theoretical nor productive. Strictly speaking, there is no ethical virtue in Plato, as is evident from the *Republic*. I here limit myself to the citation of two crucial passages.

In 6. 500d4–8, Socrates says that the philosopher “makes” or “fashions” (*plattein*) not only himself but “temperance, justice, and all of demotic virtue” as copies of the Ideas. In 7. 518d9 ff., he explains that, with one exception, what are called virtues are closer to the body than to the soul and are produced by custom and exercise (*ethesi kai askēsesin*). The exception is the virtue of *phronēsis*, or intelligence, which is altogether more divine than the others.

The distinction between the genuine or philosophical virtue and the demotic or vulgar virtues is equivalent to the distinction between intelligence and what Aristotle calls the ethical or practical virtues. Plato makes no distinction between theoretical and practical intelligence at the level of philosophy. Instead, he distinguishes between theoretical and productive uses of intelligence. In the light of this distinction, politics is a productive rather than a purely theoretical art.

I say that politics is not “purely” theoretical in order to capture an ambiguity in the Platonic texts. This ambiguity may be illustrated by a reference to the dialogue *Statesman*. The main spokesman of this dialogue, the Eleatic Stranger, engages in a long, extremely tangled discussion full of obscure divisions and containing an equally obscure myth, the upshot of which is to treat politics as both theoretical and productive. The initial distinction of the sciences and arts is between the practical and the gnostic. The gnostic *technai* are stripped of *praxis*; they produce nothing, neither *pragmata* nor *erga*, that is, neither things nor deeds. The practical *technai* such as carpentry and the handicrafts help to complete bodies that did not previously exist (258d4–e7).

The following question now arises: Where does Plato classify politics? According to the official diaeresis of the *Statesman*, it lies within the gnostic branch, although the Stranger contradicts himself by placing it first within the purely critical or discriminatory subbranch (260b3) and later in the epitactic subbranch, that is,

among such arts as architecture, which command or arrange in an order (292b9).

Commanding arts like architecture do not themselves produce but rather give orders for production. Politics is such an art and therefore exemplifies what one may call the intersection between theory and production, but not at all what Aristotle is the first to call practice. This is why the art of weaving plays a central role as a paradigm of the art of the statesman (for example, 305e2 ff.). But weaving is a productive, not a theoretical art. We could say that weaving is instrumental to *phronēsis*, which is identified as the royal or political art *par excellence* (295c5 ff.). But we should note that the concluding summary of the dialogue begins with the assertion that we are speaking of the “synthetic sciences” and their *pragmata*, that is, their practical productions (308b10 ff.).

These practical productions are, of course, both the city and its citizens. The materials from which the statesman weaves the web of the city are human beings (308d1). It belongs exclusively to the statesman and good lawgiver, acting on behalf of the Muse of the royal art, to produce (*empoiein*) within the souls of correctly blended citizens of diverse natures the true *doxa* (309d1 ff.). And this is also the doctrine of Plato’s most famous and comprehensive discussion of the relation between philosophy and politics, namely, the *Republic*.

It would take me too far afield to illustrate with detailed citations the productive nature of philosophical politics in the *Republic*. Having already done this elsewhere,⁸ I restrict myself here to the general statement that in the *Republic* Socrates regularly refers to the activity of the philosopher-kings as poetic or demiurgic (for example, 3, 394b9–c1; the guardians are restricted to being demiurges of the freedom of the city). The productive nature of politics also follows from the sickness of the human soul (*Gorgias* 505a6 ff.), that is, the rule by nature of desire over spiritedness and intelligence, in the terms of the *Republic*, which must be corrected by the medicinal art of philosophy.⁹ The city, in other words, particularly the healthy city, does not exist by nature. It must be produced by a theoretico-productive art whose paradigms include weaving and medicine.

The true statesman does not produce directly, but indirectly, either by formulating laws and customs (as in the *Republic*) or by ruling over those who are capable of producing a city of virtuous citizens (as in the *Statesman*). The reason it is necessary to produce the city is that man is naturally defective, even sick; this defect or illness can be cured, or else contained, by the art of weaving together human beings whose natural differences correspond to the warp and woof of a cloak, blanket, or other woven artifact.

In the *Statesman*, theoretical production is not addressed to the mastery of the cosmos but rather to the therapy or care (*therapeia*, *epimeleia*) of human beings. This care is illustrated by the paradigm of weaving, particularly the weaving of wool into various shelters or garments for protecting the body against the rigors of nature (279c7). In sum, politics is a theoretico-productive art that corrects nature or supplements it with artifacts for the protection of human beings. Politics is both productive and defensive. I can now express the fundamental difference between the ancients and the moderns in political terms. The ancients construct tools as a defense against nature; the moderns subscribe to the thesis that the best defense is a powerful offense.

By putting the point in this way, I do not at all intend to overlook or minimize the importance of radical new discoveries in mathematics, physics, engineering, and the other natural sciences. But even if these discoveries were all made independently of more general philosophical reflection, which I doubt, it remains true that the coordinated plan to employ them for the safety and increased comfort of the human race, and still more fundamentally to make humankind the master and possessor of nature, is political in the comprehensive sense of that term.

In this light, one may suggest that the incomplete separation of theory from production in Plato, as well as the absence of a distinct buffer zone of the practical, makes it easy to conceive of the fundamental paradigm of the modern revolution: a theoretically articulated project, initiated by the human will, to transform human life through the instrumental mastery of nature. This is much closer to the Platonic paradigm of philosophy as the unity of theory and

practico-production, which culminates in the prophetic or lawgiving activity of the philosopher, than it is to the Aristotelian paradigm of theoretical philosophy as independent from practice, and of both as independent from production.

The modern epoch does not originate in a shift from Aristotelian theory to a production that is equally Aristotelian in its distinctness from practice. It would be more accurate to say that modernity originates in a shift from the Aristotelian tripartition of the arts and sciences to a revision of the Platonic model in which, despite the fundamental distinction between knowing and making, the lines separating theory, action, and production are tangled and blurred. The tangled state of these lines thus constitutes a genuinely Platonic presupposition for the eventual assimilation of theory into practico-production in the modern epoch.

Let me emphasize that I am not attempting the anachronistic task of making Plato into a modern, and I have not forgotten the differences between Platonic *theōria* and modern constructive theory. My suggestion is intended to broaden the terms within which discussion of the origin of modernity takes place. Hitherto it has been popular, even in the face of recent criticism, to present the origin of modernity as a renaissance of Plato's mathematical *theōria*. I leave this claim as it stands, suggesting instead that the deeper influence of Platonism on early modernity is practico-productive.

One more reference to the *Republic* may serve as an effort to clarify and sharpen this suggestion. In book 10, Socrates observes that there are three *technai* that pertain to all other arts: using, making, and imitating. Of these three, it is the *technē* of the user that determines the excellence, beauty, and rightness of everything that is made or that exists by nature (601d1 ff.). The user is, of course, man, and the useful is relative to human intentions, which are independent of the mathematical or eidetic structures of things even if conditioned by them.

The subordination of making and imitating to usefulness is the core of the union between production and practice. It is no doubt true that in Plato human intentions are subordinated to the natures of things, and also to human nature. But this in itself does not

constitute a difference between Platonism and modernity. It will take several centuries for the subordination of form and essence to mathematics, and of mathematics to the human will, to dissolve the Platonist assumption of the founders of modernity that science discovers rather than makes the natural order.

One of the crucial steps in this process, in my opinion, is a shift in the understanding of happiness. Here again I believe that I see the subterranean influence of Platonism at work. According to Aristotle, happiness is possible not only for the theoretical man but also for the practical man, albeit in two distinct senses. In Plato the possibility of happiness is considerably more obscure. Because there is no ethical or practical virtue apart from theoretical virtue, and if happiness depends upon perfection, that is, upon the possession of virtue, then the happiness of the nonphilosopher must be specious at best. One might object that it is guaranteed by the rule of the philosopher, but this rule will occur, if ever, only in the beautiful city of speech that is constructed in the *Republic*, and the possibility of this city is, to say the least, dubious.

As to the philosopher himself, there is good reason to suspect that he also cannot be truly happy in the imperfect city; to the extent that such happiness is available, it seems to be associated with a radical detachment from political or communal existence, and so with assimilation into a pure intellectual contemplation of eternal forms. On balance, one must say that the Platonic dialogues lean toward the teaching that human life is unhappy. The sickness and restlessness of the desires are amenable only to a perception of the good or, as one may also express this, to a perception of the goodness of reason.

When reason becomes separated from the good, as happens in early modernity under the influence of an un-Platonic reliance upon the exclusive paradigm of mathematics, the desires are no longer subject to rational restriction. Geometrical structure and algebraic ratio carry no sense of temperance or of the nobility of reason. There is no longer any reason to restrict the desires, not even the desire to conquer, and thus change, geometrical and algebraic order. Happiness is then reinterpreted as the satisfaction of desire,

and satisfaction is shifted into the future. As Leo Strauss once said of John Locke's doctrine of man, life is the joyless quest for joy. To which I would add, How dangerously close to Plato!

III

So much for my sketch of the suggestion that the practico-productive dimension of Platonism has an important role to play in the origin of modernity. I now turn to a corollary thesis, namely, that the modern view of the unending perfectibility of *technē* was accessible to the ancients as well. We have just seen that in the Platonic dialogues, *technē*, whether productive or imitative, is subordinated to human intentions on the one hand and to *phronēsis*, or sound judgment, on the other. This is quite different from the claim that *technē* is subordinated to the Ideas, and, in fact, I know of no occurrence of that claim in the Platonic dialogues.

The Ideas serve as the *telos* of philosophical Eros or, in an alternative formulation, of pure theoretical cognition. They may be said to determine what is truly, and so what can be known, but they do not directly determine what we ought to do or make. This determination depends entirely upon the mediation of the philosopher-king and thus upon theoretical rather than practico-productive excellence.

Even here, it is not so much the direct apprehension of pure forms that guides the political activity of the philosopher as it is his intellectual judgment concerning how human beings ought to live if those who cannot see the Ideas are to be preserved in an orderly and temperate community. As to the excellence of such a community, it is determined in the final analysis by the degree to which the philosophical life can take place within it. As I have already noted, the nonphilosophical or demotic justice is associated with the body, not the soul. In the case of the soul, justice is equivalent to *phronēsis*, or intelligence, the same term that occurs in the *Statesman* to designate the perfect form of the royal art.

All this being so, it follows that the intentions of the philosopher, who is for Plato the highest type of human being, ought to direct all of the arts and sciences. This direction should be in the light of

the Ideas, or what Socrates calls the light of the highest Idea or principle of the Ideas, the Good (518d9 ff.). The Good is not itself an Idea in the sense of a form of this or that kind of being; Socrates compares it to the sun that illuminates all things on the face of the earth and thereby causes them to grow as well as to be visible.

It would not be easy to show that the Good serves a political or ethical role in addition to what we may call its ontological function as the principle of beingness, or *ousia*. Stated as sharply as possible, the Good does not tell us what to do. What it does is to illuminate the Ideas toward which we, that is to say, in the first instance the philosophers among us, are directed by Eros. From all points of view, I believe, one arrives at the conclusion that human activity, on Plato's analysis, ought to be regulated by the philosopher, who is in turn guided in his intentions by the love of wisdom. The philosopher is guided in his intentions by philosophy.

IV

To return to the case of *technē*, it is not difficult to understand the sense in which it is to be regulated by philosophy. In the *Republic*, for example, *technē* is regulated in order to preserve the rule of the philosophers, which in turn is required if the city is to be just. But why do we require a just city? In order to be happy, which in turn depends upon a well-regulated soul. And this can be acquired only if philosophers are kings and kings philosophers.

Strictly speaking, it is false to say that justice, except as a synonym for philosophy, is for Plato a good in itself. The most that could be claimed is that happiness or blessedness is a good in itself, and that this requires us to be just. This amounts to saying that philosophy and happiness are synonymous, or, more narrowly, that they are synonymous in the city that allows the perfect philosopher to exist. In actual or historical cities, the reasons for restricting the progress of *technē* are not so compelling. I do not mean by this that Plato was in favor of unlimited technical progress as a principle of his ordinary political doctrine. No doubt he was quite conservative on this point, as on many others. But if the philosopher does not rule, then the city cannot, as it were, be abstracted from history. In all actual

cities the happiness available to the philosopher must be entirely private, as I have noted previously.

This is not contradicted by the extraordinary emphasis on politics in the Platonic dialogues. That emphasis is due in the last analysis to the conflict between philosophy and politics, or to the inexpugnable conflict between philosophical and nonphilosophical conceptions of happiness. It is this conflict that leads us to doubt whether happiness is available to human beings of any kind, whether philosophical or not, given Plato's understanding of our natures.

One might therefore listen to the conversations of Socrates, or somewhat later read the Platonic dialogues, and come away with the feeling that philosophy is irrelevant to human well-being, let alone to human happiness. And this doubt places the question of *technē* in quite a different light. Or rather, it shifts us back to the light of ordinary political experience, as that light is cast upon the pages of Thucydides' *History of the Peloponnesian War*.

Thucydides is silent about philosophy in his great inquiry; the word appears only once, in the speech of Pericles, where it does not carry the Platonic sense but means something like *paideia*, or musical and verbal cultivation. If the fundamental fact about human life is war, then it is impossible to restrict the development of *technē*. This problem is not discussed by Socrates in the *Republic*; despite the crucial role of the guardians, we are given the impression that war may be limited if not entirely avoided, together with what is today called international relations.

Thucydides presents us with the actual political situation in book I, chapter 71, section 3. The context is the debate between the Corinthian and Athenian representatives before the Spartan authorities in the preliminary stages of the outbreak of the war. The Corinthians contrast the daring and innovative nature of the Athenians with the slow, cautious, excessively traditional nature of the Lacedaimonians and warn that the necessities of political change require technical innovation. It is necessary in politics "just as in *technē* always to master what comes next."

Should one not then say that it is Thucydides rather than Plato who provides us with the classical antecedent of the modern

unleashing of *technē*? Perhaps so, but this is a corollary to my original thesis, not its contradiction. My suggestion was not that Plato unleashes *technē*, but that he does not, in fact, distinguish as sharply as he seems to do between the theoretical and the practico-productive *technai*. As soon as Thucydidean realism triumphs over Platonic madness, Plato's own tangling of the lines separating politics from theory on the one side and production on the other serves as a philosophical basis for the articulation of realism into a comprehensive program in which politics and philosophy are married by experimental and mathematical science.

As I see it, in the passage cited above Thucydides expresses what is implied or implicitly guaranteed by Plato's attempt to subordinate politics to philosophy, an attempt that is, for Thucydides, impossible and not even worth considering. He silently rules out the possibility of the regulation of desire by intelligence. This being so, and regardless of whether his personal political preferences are conservative or progressive, the subordination of *technē* to political control must be rejected as impolitic. Add to this the Platonic notion of politics as a productive art, and at least part of the stage is set for the advent of modernity.

Given what I call the Thucydidean inflection of Platonism, the intentions of the philosopher are directed away from imaginary principalities toward the actual task of defending humankind in its war with nature. In other words, nature is war, not peace. In ontological terms, the mathematical structure of nature is subject to the will of humankind in its pursuit of comfortable security. Ethics is replaced by physiology, and happiness gives way to the unending effort to satisfy desire.

The union of the view that life is fundamentally war with the Platonic understanding of politics as a productive *technē* gives birth to the decisively modern conception that human beings are, or may become, the masters of their destiny. As a crucial text to illustrate this conception, I cite a well-known passage from Machiavelli's *Prince*: "It is better to be impetuous than respectful, because fortune is a woman, and it is necessary, if you wish to keep her quiet, to beat her and hit her. It is evident that she lets herself rather be conquered

by such men than by those who proceed coldly. Therefore, like a woman, she is always the friend of the young, because they are less cautious, more ferocious, and command her with more audacity."¹⁰

Machiavelli is speaking here of politics, not of natural science. But my point is precisely that there is a political presupposition or context for the extension of the productive model of *technē* that is found within the natural sciences. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the political and scientific senses of technical production modify and stimulate each other so as to lead to the development of a comprehensive philosophical program of revolution, a revolution that can no longer be designated as either theoretical, practical, or productive because it is all three in one.

This passage from Machiavelli should be read together with Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*, in which, as one could say, ethics and politics are united with natural science through the medium of physiology. Descartes instructs men of strong or great souls (what the ancients called *megalopsuchia*, which he reinterprets as *generosité*) to destroy the belief in fortune by reflecting upon divine providence as equivalent to the natural order.¹¹ This order is both necessary and accessible to human intelligence. It cannot itself be changed but may be understood and so mastered in the sense that it may serve as the basis for supplementary constructions that will safeguard and improve the quality of human existence.

There is, then, no "mathematical ontology" in Descartes; mathematics is the language constructed by humankind to further the intentions of the will of the philosopher. It would also be a distortion of Plato's thought to infer from the geometrical cosmology of the *Timaeus* that he held to a mathematical ontology. At the same time, I know of no compelling evidence in the Platonic dialogues to sustain the thesis that the Platonic Ideas are arranged in a hierarchy of excellence, or what Nietzsche called a *Rangordnung*. There is no obvious sense in which the various accounts of the Platonic Ideas are connected with a doctrine of teleology. On the contrary, the order of excellence in the cosmos is usually attributed by Plato's interlocutors to the *epimeleia* of the ranked Olympian gods, led by Zeus, who order and care for the cosmos.¹²

This attribution means that the intentions of the philosopher, despite his Eros for the Ideas, are determined directly not by them, but by the philosopher's *phronēsis*, or judgment, as to what action best serves the interest of philosophy. Such a view comes much closer than the Aristotelian teleology to the modern doctrine of the freedom of thought from regulation by natural ends, even while respecting the natural order. One has only to replace the Platonic Ideas with the geometrical structures of the *Timaeus* or, more radically, with the symbolical beings of modern mathematics, and the philosopher is transformed into a mathematical physicist free to do whatever he believes will satisfy his desire for the truth. And this is a step away from the desire to satisfy desire.

That Aristotle is not so close to modernity on this point may be suggested by the following citation from the *Politics*. In book I, at 1257b25 ff., Aristotle says, "The art of medicine pursues health without limit, and each of the arts pursues its end in an unlimited way (for they wish to accomplish this to the greatest possible extent); although with respect to the end they do not proceed in an unlimited way (for the end is a limit to all the arts)."

In other words, *technē* has no intrinsic limit with respect to the development and perfection of means to the accomplishment of its end. This is especially plain in the case of war, in which each stage in the development of weaponry forces the opponent to match and surpass it. But according to Aristotle, there is an external limit to the progress of *technē*, namely, the end toward which it is directed. Peace is the natural limit to war, and health is the natural limit to medicine. What does this argument amount to? It seems to license unending technical perfection, with the nominal qualification that such perfection is always in the service of an unchanging end or limit.

This is a fragile argument for more than one reason. If technical progress is allowed to continue endlessly, a time will come, as we have reason to know, when the ends will themselves be dissolved by an unending process of interpretation. In addition, progress in the development of weaponry may come to a temporary end with the conclusion of one war, yet it starts up again with the outbreak of

new hostilities, to say nothing of secret research during periods of ostensible peace. And an analogous argument may be constructed in the case of medicine. For all practical purposes, this means that the ends do not serve to limit technical progress but at the most to identify it as progress of such-and-such a type. As we also have reason to know, these types are not so easy to distinguish; the line between medicinal and military research cannot be drawn cleanly on the basis of a view toward the telos of health.

For a text from the Aristotelian school, if not directly from the master himself, that is closer in keeping with the origins of modernity, we may cite the opening lines of the treatise called *Mechanical Problems* (*Mēchanika*), usually attributed to the post-Aristotelian peripatetic school. This text begins by distinguishing between "marvelous events that occur in accordance with nature, of which we do not know the cause, and those that occur contrary to nature, which come to be through *technē* for the benefit of mortals. For in many cases nature makes something that is contrary to our benefit. For nature always acts in the same way and simply; but what is beneficial changes frequently."

This is extraordinarily modern in spirit. The author goes on to say that we must have recourse to *technē* in order to produce a "device" (*mēchanē*) that will enable us to act contrary to nature. "For as the poet Antiphon wrote, and as is true, 'we master by *technē* those things in which we are conquered by nature'" (847a11–21).¹³ It reminds us of the Cartesian radicalization of Bacon's New Instauration, or the turn to a practico-productive theory with the power to make men the masters and possessors of nature.¹⁴ I have been suggesting that the middle term between Antiphon and Descartes is Plato rather than Aristotle.

V

According to Sir Francis Bacon, the greatest obstacle to progress in the sciences lies "in the despair of mankind and in the supposition of its impossibility."¹⁵ A parallel remark is to be found in Descartes' *Passions of the Soul*. In speaking of desires that depend upon ourselves for fulfillment, Descartes says, "The fault that one is accustomed to

commit here, is never to desire too much; it is only that one desires too little."¹⁶ The possibility of scientific progress is implicit in *technē*, that is, in the proceedings of the artisans, which we must employ to discover the force and the actions of the elements and the heavens.¹⁷ This is an example of activity that depends upon ourselves.

What one could call Platonic pessimism, or a despair of the possibility of happiness, lightly disguised by the salutary equanimity of a Socrates "grown beautiful and young,"¹⁸ is transformed into the optimism of the founding fathers of modernity by a series of steps, some of which, paradoxical though it may sound at first hearing, have been furnished by Plato himself.

Unlike the analogous situation in Aristotle, the cosmos of genesis is, according to Plato, not eternal but transient and cyclic. This has to do with the famous and obscure "separation" of the Platonic forms from their generated copies or instances, as well as with the reduction of virtue to wisdom and the correlative assimilation of practico-production into the domain of philosophical *phronēsis*.

None of this is intended to suggest that modernity is a direct consequence of, or even that it is somehow at bottom fully compatible with, Platonism. Perhaps I could summarize this essay by saying that I sense in Plato a poetical discontent with the place of human beings in the cosmos that I do not find in Aristotle. From this standpoint, I would not regard the aporetic nature of so many of the Socratic conversations, or the reliance upon myth in the decisive cases of the soul, the city, and the cosmos, as concealing a deeper positive teaching but rather as presenting a lightly masked representation, couched in the tones of Attic urbanity, of the incipient spirit of modernity.

I close with a prudent reminder: As these terms are normally employed, Plato was an ancient, not a modern. I mean by this something more than the obvious chronological or historical remark. The practico-productive nature of Plato's philosophy is restrained by the Ideas on the one hand and the radical difference between the philosopher and the nonphilosopher on the other. There is no point in speculating upon what Plato would have said, had he been aware of modern mathematics and natural science. Yet I cannot entirely

restrain the impression that he would have aligned himself with the founders of modernity, less because of the spirit of philanthropy than because of his deeply poetical soul.

To say this in one more way, the "dialectic" of the dialogues, understood as the aporetic effort to grasp the visible yet illusive Ideas, and as distinct from the (in my opinion) imaginary dialectic of pure Ideas that Socrates wishes for in the *Republic*, is closer to what Hegel called "the peculiar restlessness and dispersion of our modern consciousness"¹⁹ than is the Aristotelian effort to imitate the "thought thinking itself" of the god of the philosophers. I say this despite Hegel's own marked preference for Aristotle, upon whom he clearly modeled himself, and also despite what is to my mind the finally unconvincing portrait in Plato of philosophical *Heiterkeit*, or "beyondness," a portrait that is contradicted by the actual description of human existence, including the destiny of the philosopher, for whom life is a preparation for dying.

Whether this impression is right or wrong, however, has no bearing upon the soundness of the suggestion that I have outlined in this essay. Plato's contribution to the origin of modernity is closer to *technē* or *poiēsis* than it is to mathematics.

Notes

- 1 This essay was written for the Symposium on Science, Reason, and Modern Democracy, held at Michigan State University during the academic year 1989–90. For the details of publication see the Acknowledgments.
- 2 The quote is from *The Assayer*, the passage is cited in Gary Hatfield, "Metaphysics and the New Science," in *Reappraisals of the Scientific Revolution*, ed. D. Lindberg and R. Westman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 530.
- 3 Stillman Drake, *Galileo at Work* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. xxi.
- 4 Hatfield, "Metaphysics and the New Science," p. 530.
- 5 *Ibid.*, p. 132.
- 6 Hatfield grants that Kepler was motivated by a theoretical or ontological Platonism; see page 109 in the cited essay.
- 7 See Alexandre Koyré, *Metaphysics and Measurement* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), pp. 13–15.

- 8 See my book *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry* (New York: Routledge, 1988), esp. chapters 1, 3. See also, "Philosophy and Poetry in Plato," chapter 6 of this volume.
- 9 Cf. the discussion of ugliness and disease in *Sophist* 228a4 ff. with the comparison between philosophy and medicine in *Gorgias* 464d2 ff. and 500e4 ff.
- 10 *Il principe*, in *Il principe e Discorsi* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 1960), 101.
- 11 *Les passions de l'ame*, ed. C. Rodis-Lewis (Paris: J. Vrin, 1955), 170.
- 12 See, for example, *Phaedrus* 246d6 ff., as well as *Statesman* 271c3 ff.
- 13 I am indebted to David Lachterman for calling this passage to my attention.
- 14 *Discours de la Méthode*, ed. E. Gilson (Paris: J. Vrin, 1947), 61 f.
- 15 *Instauratio Magna*, in *Works*, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath (Boston: Brown, 1861), 1:415. See 406, where Bacon says that human beings tend to underrate their strength.
- 16 *Les passions de l'ame*, 177.
- 17 *Discours*, 62.
- 18 *Epistles*, 2, 314c4.
- 19 *Wissenschaft der Logik* (Leipzig: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1951), I:20.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Platonic Hermeneutics: On the Interpretation of a Platonic Dialogue

I should like to begin with a citation from Plato's *Symposium*. Early in her instruction of the young Socrates, Diotima explains to him that the power of Eros, a great daimon intermediate between the divine and the mortal, is "to interpret (*hermeneuon*) and convey the things from humans to gods and the things from gods to humans: from the one needs and sacrifices; from the others, orders and recompense for the sacrifices. Being in the middle and so filled up with both, it thus binds together the whole to itself."¹

Diotima's playful words raise a serious question about the ontological *topos* of the so-called Platonic Ideas. Are they within the whole or beyond it? If they are within the whole, it would seem that, even if they are initially discerned by intellectual perception, their discursive intelligibility is dependent upon erotic hermeneutics rather than upon the much praised but rarely if ever employed dialectic. But if they are beyond the whole, as the good is said by Socrates to be "beyond being" (*epekeina tēs ousias*),² then it is at best problematical whether they could be accessible to the explanatory discourse of Eros or dialectic.

It is widely believed that Plato responded to something like this problem by shifting from the transcendent Ideas of his middle period to a more sober and linguistically oriented analysis of immanent, not to say syntactic, concepts. On this view, ontology is replaced by grammatology. I shall allude to some of the technical details of this complex situation as my lecture progresses. At this point, I want merely to make an introductory remark. If Plato in fact took "the linguistic turn," then poetry has indeed won its old quarrel with philosophy.

My topic tonight, however, is not contemporary Plato scholarship, but Plato himself. I want to suggest an answer to the following

question: what is erotic hermeneutics? To express this with the appropriate Platonic playfulness, I want to deconstruct, not my professional colleagues, but Plato. I choose the term "deconstruction" as a tribute, but also, as I shall immediately make clear, as a rebuke, to the remarkable essay by Jacques Derrida, "La pharmacie de Platon."³

I have no space here for an extensive analysis of Derrida's text. I do, however, want to claim that Derrida is illuminating for a more fundamental reason than that he makes many fine observations on passages in the *Phaedrus*. Derrida states the central problematic of the Platonic dialogues in a forceful way by attributing to Plato a preference for speech over writing because of his adherence to a metaphysics of presence. In my view, this takes us to the heart of the matter, but it almost exactly inverts the correct inferences to be drawn from the Platonic corpus.

One other preliminary remark is in order. In Derridean deconstruction, one establishes the implicit and unintended sense of the author's text by placing his intentional doctrine "sous rature," that is to say, under a crossing-out which is not actually an erasure. Derrida wishes to free us from the restrictions of a phonocentric metaphysics itself. However Derrida is to be understood in himself, the point of importance for us is that I shall attribute an intentional self-deconstruction to Plato, as an intrinsic feature of his presentation, not of Being, but of the absence of an epistemic speech about Being. In this deconstruction, what is, as it were, "sous rature" is not to be erased, but must be preserved in an irresolvable tension with the "rature" itself. In other words, it is not what is represented by the Ideas that is deconstructed, but epistemic discourse about the Ideas.

I turn now to a general statement of the structural tension in the Platonic dialogues. The dialogues are woven together from two rhetorics, that of mathematics, which is the warp, and that of poetry, which is the woof of the text. These rhetorics treat in the first instance (but not exclusively) with the Ideas or pure forms on the one hand and the soul on the other. The most important exception to the general use of mathematical rhetoric with respect to the Ideas occurs in

the *Phaedrus*. This passage will be of importance to us in due order. For the moment, the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium* supply us with the most famous sources for the Platonic doctrine that the soul is erotic: it longs for and is directed toward the Ideas. However, the soul is incommensurable with the Ideas in any but a prophetic or visionary sense. This is evident, not merely from so-called "middle" dialogues like the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* (to say nothing of the *Republic*), but is also plain enough in later dialogues like the *Sophist*. I have assembled the evidence on this point in my book on the *Sophist*, and will allude to some of it this evening.

Continuing with my general statement, discourse is both shaped and guided by the Ideas; yet, as soon as we begin to speak about them, we lose or blur our vision of them. We substitute discursive artifacts or images for the originals. This substitute, which one might call in the Derridean style a "supplement" for the discursively inaccessible being, is writing, whether as inscribed within the soul or in an external and physical medium. In somewhat greater detail, as Derrida points out, Socrates defines speech in the *Phaedrus* as a writing within the soul. In the *Theaetetus*, he explains discursive thinking (*dianoesthai*) as the soul conversing with itself, and *logos* as making *dianoia* clear through speech. This is the same definition that is given by the Eleatic Stranger in the *Sophist*.⁴ If we take these texts together, we may infer that talking aloud, when it inscribes *logos* together with knowledge in the soul of the learner, is the same as *dianoia* or discursive thinking.

In a passage that is also cited by Derrida, in the *Laws*, the Athenian Stranger makes a crucial distinction. The serious is concerned with the divine, and the playful is concerned with the human.⁵ We have just seen, in effect, that the proper distinction to be made with respect to *logos* is not between speech and writing, but rather between epistemic and non-epistemic discourse. Since speech is a kind of writing, if there is serious writing, it will be dianoetic *epistēmē*. Otherwise stated, there can be serious writing if and only if there is a dianoetic *epistēmē* of the Ideas. But no such *epistēmē* appears anywhere in the dialogues. Once more on Derridean grounds, we can therefore take Socrates' criticism of writing as play in the *Phaedrus*,

together with Plato's own disownment of writing in general, and his dialogues in particular, in the *Letters*, to justify the following conclusion. Since speech is writing and writing is playful, not only is there no serious writing, but there is no speech. I mean by this that what Derrida calls "phonocentrism" is entirely absent from the Platonic dialogues. On the basis of evidence that he himself cites, *there is for Plato nothing but writing*.⁶

Platonic writing, I have suggested, is the weaving together of two rhetorics. To state my thesis as sharply as possible, Plato praises mathematics and a quasi-mathematical eidetic analysis, but within the context of a poetic rhetoric that transforms his praise into a dream.⁷ Socrates says in the *Republic* that mathematicians are men who dream that they are awake.⁸ In the *Theaetetus*, he introduces his attempt to acquire knowledge of the elements of things as "a dream." However, Socrates, unlike the mathematicians, is awake, which is to say, he knows that he was previously dreaming. The *Theaetetus* ends in failure to define *epistēmē* as well as to work out an epistemic *logos* of the elements of things.⁹

At this point in my discussion, I must distinguish Derrida's interpretation from the views of professional Platonists. Derrida makes no distinction between the early and middle Plato on the one hand, and the later Plato on the other. He consequently draws no substantive distinction between the speeches assigned to Socrates, and those assigned to Timaeus and the two Strangers. His account of the metaphysics of presence proceeds as though that doctrine were itself uniformly present from one end of the Platonic corpus to the other. There is a sense in which I agree with him, namely, the sense in which I take the inversion of his thesis to constitute the fundamental problematic of the Platonic teaching as a whole.

One may rightly add to this that the thesis of the two Platos, represented, let us say, by Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger, faces serious objections in its own right. First, as I shall shortly argue, the currently popular interpretation of the technical digression in the *Sophist* is textually indefensible. By way of corollary to this point, I add that the formal elements are never "derived" by the Eleatic Stranger

from anything remotely resembling the division and collection of kinds. They are simply pointed to by the Stranger, and immediately accepted by Theaetetus, his partner in the investigation. Second, Plato returns to Socrates as his main spokesman in the *Philebus*, a dialogue that contains a rhetorical discussion of diaeresis, but no trace of the doctrines of the Eleatic Stranger. Third, there can be no serious understanding of the *Sophist* that does not consider it in conjunction with the *Theaetetus* and *Statesman* as a dramatic trilogy which is in its turn read against the backdrop of the trial of Socrates.

On what is today still called the "analytical" reading of the *Sophist*, it stands alone as a technical anticipation of the doctrines of Frege and the early Wittgenstein. In other words, the "analysts," whom one should rather call the "esotericists," attribute a secret teaching to Plato, namely, that of a proto-analyst, on the basis of which they disregard the form and major portions of the written text. The central divination of the esotericist interpretation is the transformation of the form of being into the linguistic operations of predication and the expression of identity. In my book on the *Sophist*, I have shown in detail why this instance of divine *mania* must unfortunately be rejected by a sober reading of the dialogue. In this lecture, I can only summarize the pertinent argument of my book. I will do so in such a way as to show that the failure of the Stranger's ostensible innovations follows in a straightforward way from the poetic rhetoric of the *Phaedrus*, a dialogue in which mathematics is represented only by elementary (and not always correctly or clearly performed) operations of counting items in a list.¹⁰

To round off this series of remarks, I believe that I can make a plausible case tonight for the two theses that the esotericist reading of the *Sophist* is mistaken, and that Derrida's account of the status of speaking and the parousia of being in Plato is topsy-turvy. I therefore claim finally to make a suggestive case, although I cannot prove, that all parts of the Platonic corpus cohere in an intentionally self-deconstructive (but *not* destructive) praise of techniques modeled upon mathematics, a praise that is in fact directed toward poetry, or, following Diotima, toward erotic hermeneutics.

Our next task is to recall that the Platonic dialogues assign various senses to the terms "dialectic" and "diaeresis," which are sometimes employed as though they were synonymous, and sometimes not. We do not need to make a detailed textual analysis here of the passages to which I refer. The most important occur in the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, and the *Philebus*.¹¹ A study of these passages shows that the following distinguishable operations are attributed at different times to dialectic or diaeresis: (1) counting the number of formal elements in a complex eidetic structure; (2) dividing phenomenal complexes into their underlying constitutive formal kinds, and collecting phenomenal instances under the appropriate formal kind; (3) the analysis of how pure formal elements containing no internal structure combine and do not combine with one another; (4) an intellecting or kind of intellectual perception, employing *logos*, that moves from "hypotheses" (presumably sensuous and dianoetic beings) to Ideas, and which then "discharges" its hypotheses and proceeds from Ideas, via Ideas, to Ideas.

We can get some kind of grip on these disparate operations by distinguishing two families of pure forms, sometimes called Ideas and sometimes not. I shall call the first family "phenomenological" and include within it all Ideas of perceivable beings, but also of ethical virtues like justice and abstract relations like "greater than," all of which, despite their abstractness, are exhibited as what they are within a perceivable complex like a human action or a relation of physical things. This is a rough and ready grouping of more or less disparate kinds of Ideas, but it will serve my purpose. I want to call the second family "ontological" because I include in it formal elements like the "greatest genera" of the *Sophist* – *being, change, rest, same, other* – as well as similar, formal elements mentioned elsewhere, such as unity, multiplicity, and so on. I call these elements "ontological" because they are, or are intended as, the ultimate constituents of things, and are necessarily "present within" Ideas belonging to the phenomenological family. However, their presence is not viewed in the same way that we perceive a body or combination of bodies, a human being engaged in a given act, and so on. I can see that an act is just,

but to say that an act or a body is a being is, if true, true of everything, including an unjust act or an incorporeal quality. Again, I can see that something is changing, but I cannot see an instance of change apart from something changing.

I repeat that this is a rough and ready distinction. But it is good enough for the introductory purpose for which I have formulated it. Which of the aforementioned Ideas or forms constitutes the subject-matter of a metaphysics of presence? If we mean by a metaphysics of presence the thesis that we intellectually perceive Ideas, then we may include both families within its subject matter. But if the expression "metaphysics of presence" refers to a discursive explanation of "Being" (with a capital "B"), then we require a complete enumeration of the ultimate constituents of everything, as well as an account of how they do and do not combine, but beyond this, an explanation of how they enter into combination with other, phenomenological Ideas to produce each of the disparate types of being in the world, ranging from souls and spiritual qualities through numbers and logical relations to bodies and corporeal properties.

I am tempted to say at this point that we need to distinguish between phenomenology and ontology. But this is rather misleading, since nothing like a phenomenology, in the proper or Husserlian sense, is to be found in the Platonic dialogues. (Parenthetically, I will leave it an open question whether anything like a Hegelian phenomenology appears in Plato, as this is too difficult a topic to explore here.) Socrates recommends, for example, that we discern, not by any method, but by just looking carefully, the polyeidetic structure of the empirically accessible ox. He then recommends that we count up the elements in this eidetic structure; but even if we could do this, and if to do this would be to engage in phenomenology, it would hardly contribute to an ontology or metaphysics of presence understood as a discursive science. The phenomenology in question here would not be Husserlian, if only because Husserl tells us to describe the structure of intuited essences, that is, of the content of pure eidetic consciousness. But Socrates is talking about the eidetic structure of the being named "ox," not of the structure of our perception of the ox. Eidetic perception in Plato has no structure.

If it occurs at all, then, it is fair to say that it puts us directly in the presence of the Idea.

However, to be in the presence of an Idea is one thing, and to analyze discursively its formal structure is something else again. Furthermore, even if we could carry out Socrates' recommendation to count up the formal elements in structures of various kinds, this would produce nothing but lists of the formal elements constituting those structures. In short, at the very least, if there is to be a metaphysics of presence in the sense of a dianoetic *epistēmē*, then we require an exhaustive account of the ultimate elements and their manner of combination. The closest Plato comes to describing an ontology in this sense is in the *Sophist*. None of the other discussions, including the elaborate comedy in the *Parmenides*, is of anything more than ancillary interest with respect to such an *epistēmē*. We must therefore turn to the *Sophist*, or more precisely, to what the Eleatic Stranger refers to as the digression in the hunting of the sophist via diaeresis.

The central problem of the dialogue is as follows. In order to define the sophist, we must distinguish between the paradigm or original of the wise man, on the one hand, and the accurate and inaccurate images of the original, the philosopher and sophist respectively, on the other. Unfortunately, our access to the original is via the images. We cannot look directly at the wise man, in the way that the onlooker inspects the living portrait, in order to decide whether someone who claims to be a philosopher is actually a sophist. But neither can we make this determination by analyzing the discourse of the claimant. First, the philosopher must speak truly about what truly is. But speech is already an image of our intellectual perception of form. As I noted above, phenomenology is not ontology. Second, the philosopher must be able to explain false statement as part of his explanation of truth. But explanation is rooted ultimately in speech about pure formal combinations, whereas falsehood is rooted in separation which is not a pure form. The problem of the explanation of being and truth is thus linked to the problem of the explanation of non-being and falsehood.

In order to be meaningful, and hence either true or false, a statement must refer to something which is countable or nameable; it does this by combining the names of two or more forms in the case of ontological discourse, and the act of combination cannot itself be an act of separation. What we may call the mathematical foundation of ontology is thus captured in the three principles of reference, enumeration, and non-contradiction. But in the Stranger's account, an ontological statement (to restrict ourselves to these) is not a mathematical function in the modern sense. In addition, when we make the necessary distinction between the grammatical form of the statement, and the ontological fact which the statement reports, the fact is not that of Aristotelian predication. The Stranger gives two paradigms for the concatenating of the names of formal elements that make this plain: spelling and musical composition. A simple example of spelling will suffice. In order to spell the word "cat," we combine the letters "c," "a," and "t." No letter is predicated of any other letter, nor is there a separate letter for the combining function.

The inapplicability of the paradigm of predication is also obvious from the simplicity or moneidetic nature of the elements. Aristotelian predication is either accidental or necessary. But ontological combination cannot be accidental, and necessary predication depends upon internally articulated essences. The inapplicability of the Fregean paradigm of the mathematical function can be illustrated by the following example. Consider the ontological statement "change is," which by the Stranger's doctrine is a "well-formed formula," even though it offends the ear and syntactical sensibilities of the English-speaking esotericist. In the interest of intelligibility, I restrict myself to the first stage in the correct ontological analysis of the statement "change is." This stage yields the statement "the form *change* combines with the form *being*."

Consider the two following alternative translations. First, we might arrive at "___ combines with ___" where the two blanks take as "values" the names of pure forms. This succeeds in isolating the combining function from the elements of combination, but it casts no light at all on which forms are allowed to combine, and which are not. The second alternative is "___ combines with the form *being*,"

which is to be construed as a function or predicate with one variable. This translation is entirely misconceived, since it blends together the form *being* with the combining function, which is in turn converted into a predicate. But the combining function would have to be represented as uniting predicates with subjects. If it were itself a predicate, we would need a new structure to designate combination.

We may be moved by the failure of these two cases to the desperate expedient of rewriting "change is" as "the form *change* is identical with itself." This translation substitutes "is identical with" for "combines with the form *being*." But according to the Stranger's doctrine, "is identical with" must itself be parsed as a combination of two forms, *being* and *same*. In the desperate expedient, "is," the name for *being*, withers away into an empty particle in the function "___ is identical with ___." To make a long story short, since I have worked out the details elsewhere, the esoteric techniques of the self-styled analysts result in the replacement of *being* by identity and predication. Being (with a capital "B") is transformed into discourse, exactly as in the case of Derridean deconstruction.

However, once we have rejected the grammatological explanation, it remains to show that the Stranger's analysis is incoherent in its own terms. I must limit myself tonight to the illustration of three defects in the Stranger's doctrine. The easiest of these to state turns on the pure or simple nature of each formal element. In particular, *same* and *other* are distinct from each other and from each of the remaining elements. Thus *change* is not in itself the same as itself, but only by way of combining with the form *same*, and a similar result follows with respect to its otherness and being. *Change* cannot be itself independently, but only as already combined with the forms *being*, *same*, and *other*. In this case, the doctrine of pure or monoeidetic elements collapses into a Hegelian dialectical logic. It does the Stranger no good to say that the forms are independent in themselves but necessarily woven together by speech, since this leads precisely to the deconstructive conclusion that an accurate ontology or epistemic discourse is impossible.

To illustrate the second difficulty, consider the statement "change is other than rest," i.e. "the form *change* is *other* than the form *rest*."

We want to say simply that the form *change* is not the form *rest*. This is easy enough, but how do we explain the meaning of this statement in the Stranger's terms? Whether we employ "other than" or "not," "change is other than rest" involves the forms *being*, *change*, *rest*, *same*, and *other*. Since these are all combined, how do we know that *change* does not combine with *rest*? Remember that the grammatical meaning of the statement is rooted in or backed up by the ontological situation. The situation is that *change* is other "with respect to" *rest*. We can pick out the appropriate combinations, at best by seeing them; but any attempt to describe them must make use of the web of language.

The third difficulty is that of falsehood or the sense of "not." The fundamental problem here is that we cannot speak of nothing without violating our three principles of reference, enumeration, and non-contradiction (and note that the third principle already speaks of "not"). Parmenides has forbidden us to think or speak of "the altogether not" (*to mēdamōs on*). The Stranger claims that he must commit a parricide, or violate Parmenides' injunction, in order to resolve the problem of falsehood. In fact, he remains faithful to Parmenides, or tries to do so, by shifting from the altogether not to what we may call "determinate negation" or (on his account) otherness.

In the first place, however, "other than" is not synonymous with "not." If I say that Socrates does not exist, I do not mean that he is other than something. Second, the explanation is circular, since we cannot explain what we mean by "other than" without employing negation. Third, if "not" is backed up by the form *other*, *other* cannot be a pure monoeidetic element, but is at once transformed into a two-place predicate $O(x,y)$, where x and y are variables standing for forms. The Stranger's doctrine then indeed becomes, at this point, a linguistic doctrine, but not a coherent doctrine of predication, since the form *other* cannot itself replace one of its internal variables. And even if it could, the doctrine of elements would be abandoned.

In general, "this is not that" does not mean merely that "this something is other than that something." There is a gap or separation between this and that, which does not correspond to any

form at all. But neither does it correspond to a syntactical function. We therefore do not need to engage in a separate consideration of the problem of falsehood. The conclusion is evident: A metaphysics of presence, in the sense of a dianoetic *epistēmē* that obeys the mathematical principles of reference, enumeration, and non-contradiction, is impossible, whether for Socrates or the Eleatic Stranger. Entirely in addition to all this, it is also impossible, since not all beings are instances of pure eidetic structures. The crucial example is the soul of the individual human being. As Socrates puts this in the *Phaedrus*, if there is an Idea of the soul, its exposition would require a divine and a long explanation.¹² What Socrates offers us instead is a playful and mythical speech, as he himself characterizes it: Perhaps it touched the truth in some points, and perhaps it was led away on others.¹³

The soul, because it is prophetic, is erotic; and as erotic, it is constantly changing its shape.¹⁴ From this standpoint, the soul is like the sophist rather than the philosopher. It is this nature of the soul that underlies the thesis that all writing (and hence all speech) is playful rather than serious.¹⁵ Throughout the dialogues, ostensibly technical discussions are regularly designated as playful.¹⁶ If we are allowed to include myths, like that of the *Timaeus*, as playful discourses, and recall that a serious discourse would be about eternal or divine things, then it is safe to say that the dialogues are entirely playful. But where everything is playful, including the distinction between the serious and the playful, then the playful becomes serious.

Socrates makes it entirely clear that the *Phaedrus* is playful. This alone would guarantee that the criticism of writing is playful. But we can do better than that. Throughout the dialogue, speech and writing are discussed as a pair.¹⁷ The function of both writing and speaking is not ontological but psychagogic, that is to say, pedagogic or persuasive.¹⁸ In the broad sense of the term, it is political. Writing, in the usual or vulgar sense, is less able than conversation to adjust to the shifting nuances of the souls of the philosopher's fellow-citizens. In this connection, we note that the criticism of writing is given an Egyptian origin by Socrates; in other words, it is associated with pty rather than with Greek science.¹⁹

If we consider Socrates' myth of the soul, we find that it contains no vestige of phonocentrism. Neither the vision of the hyperuranian beings nor the recollection of this vision by an incarnate soul is marked by *logos* of any kind. Talking occurs between the parts of the soul (the charioteer and the two horses) only when they debate whether or not to have sexual intercourse with a beautiful youth.²⁰ One could at best refer to the soul, at the height of its exertions, as a divine voyeur. But even this gesture toward a metaphysics of presence must be qualified. The best of the eventually human souls, by much (speechless) striving, are at last able to stick their heads up through the roof of the world²¹ and to look at the hyperuranian beings. They gaze upon these beings with difficulty because of the (inarticulate) fuss made by the horses just below the surface.²²

To this we may add that the revolution of the world of genesis will inevitably both blur and render perspectival the soul's view of the beings fixed overhead. This passage brings Socrates very close to Heidegger, with the following difference. Whereas the hyperuranian beings are visible only as "recollected" from the change of historicity, they are themselves neither historical nor projections of proto-subjectivity. Silence is the appropriate correlative to eternity; talk generates history. Plato has thus embedded a geometrico-ontological paradigm within the algebraic language of signs, myth, absence, or eidetic silence. Conversely in the *Sophist*, Socrates remains silent while the stranger enunciates his defective technical doctrine. In itself, this silence is indeterminate, but it becomes more interesting when we recall that neither Socrates nor any other main speaker in the subsequent dialogues, whether we count by dramatic or chronological measures, ever so much as alludes to the Stranger's doctrines.

I cannot leave this series of topics without saying a word about another of Derrida's favorite accusations against Platonism, namely, phallogentrism. I would not go so far as to say that the phallus is absent from the *Phaedrus*. But Derrida seems to have missed the frequent dramatic signs by which Socrates identifies himself and the passive Phaedrus as female. The two are compared to young girls, to Bacchae, and to those who are possessed by nymphs. Socrates, whose teacher on erotic matters was a woman,

employs the female oath "by Hera!" and the dramatic locale of the dialogue suggests an analogy between Socrates and Phaedrus with the maiden Oreithuia, and Eros with the ravishing Boreas.²³ We should also remember that Socrates speaks of himself as a midwife or now sterile female who assists youths in their effort to give birth.²⁴ Socrates is alternatively the beloved of beautiful young men (as Alcibiades reveals him to be in the *Symposium*)²⁵ or the lover of the beautiful Charmides;²⁶ to the non-philosopher, as Calicles makes clear in the *Gorgias*, he is a pederast, to be seen in some corner, whispering to two or three beautiful boys.²⁷ Finally, I note that, whereas in the *Symposium*, philosophy, understood as "correct pederasty," is associated with psychic generation, in the *Phaedrus*, the celebration of the divine voyeur, there is no praise of production of any kind.²⁸ Whatever all of this means, it does not add up to phallocentrism.

Every lecturer on Plato is entitled to one moment of madness. Here is mine: an erotic hermeneutic of the Platonic dialogues shows that all doctrines are exoteric. There is no esoteric doctrine in Plato, neither that of predication nor that of Epicureanism. This is not because Plato was a skeptic in the traditional sense, but because skepticism in this sense is a doctrine. The one clear demarcation between philosophy and poetry in Plato is "skepticism" in its literal sense: *looking*. Erotic hermeneutics is preserved from relativism or skepticism only to the extent that it is guided by a vision of the good. But there is no metaphysics or ontology of the good. Instead, there is prudential writing, whether written in the souls of one's listeners or in rolls of papyrus, like the speech of Lysias that Phaedrus hides behind his back at the beginning of the dialogue bearing his name.

To summarize what has been said thus far, I accept the following statement by Derrida about the Platonic dialogue: "if truth is the presence of the *eidos*, it must always, on pain of mortal blinding by the sun's fires, come to terms with relation, nonpresence, and thus nontruth." However, I cannot quite agree with the following sentences in this passage, in which Derrida concludes that the necessity of parricide leads to the necessity of *logos*, which in turn makes

impossible any factual difference between grammar and ontology.²⁹ There is no parricide; Plato is an obedient daughter of Parmenides. Furthermore, *logos* is necessary only for those who insist upon philosophizing, but not for wise men. Finally, there is no ontology in Plato; The presence of *to ontōs on* is an absence to *logos*. Derrida, as it were, has been both intoxicated and poisoned by his discovery of the Platonic *pharmakon*.

In the *Phaedrus*, the playful writing of serious men is compared to farming for amusement that comes from gazing upon beautiful plants. These plants are the memoranda of just, beautiful, and good things, but not of the truth.³⁰ Phaedrus thus correctly calls writing an altogether beautiful game, "telling myths about justice and the other things you mention."³¹ Another word for "playfulness" in Plato is "politics." The *Phaedrus* begins with an exit from the city as a sign of the extra-political nature of the aspirations of the soul. But these aspirations are not satisfied, for reasons which we have already reviewed. After expressing his admiration for the beauty of Socrates' rhetoric, Phaedrus turns at once to the political dangers of writing.³² The edifying nature of Socrates' discourse has apparently been wasted on Phaedrus. The practical limits of the type represented by Phaedrus are thus indicated by the attempt to replace Lysias by Isocrates. Phaedrus will not be making any journeys to the roof of the cosmos.

There seems to be no political context to the discussion in the *Sophist*, but this is true only if we fail to reflect upon the obvious difference between Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger, and how their juxtaposition is related to the upcoming trial of Socrates. It is already a political act for the Stranger to attempt a fundamentally apolitical analysis of the nature of the sophist. We obtain a more solid clue as to the Stranger's political doctrine in the *Statesman*, the sequel to the *Sophist*. He says there that it is a bigger job to understand "the fitting" or "the measure" (*to metrion*) than it is to understand non-being.³³ This is no doubt because he thinks that the problem of non-being is amenable to technical solution, whereas no such recourse is available in the case of the politically fitting. The non-technical nature of the fitting leads to the intrinsic superiority of

phronēsis to law.³⁴ However, in actual practice, rule without law is undesirable and must in all cases be prohibited.³⁵

As one could also express this, there is no serious difference between the Stranger and Socrates concerning the impossibility of epistemic or technical solutions to political problems. Either there are no forms corresponding to political virtues, or their perception does not tell us what counts as a virtuous act in a given political situation. Political life is therefore erotic hermeneutic rather than the expression of a metaphysics of presence. The laws thus constitute a fantasm or necessarily inaccurate image of the unmethodological adjustment of the philosophical rhetorician. There is a harmony between the theoretical and the political in Plato: in both cases, the true icon is the fantasm. This harmony is intricate, and I do not pretend to have demonstrated tonight that it exists beyond any doubt. Nevertheless, it has been my thesis that the dialogues consist of poetic and mathematical fantasms, woven together intentionally by Plato with respect to the main points under discussion. Derrida will claim that my lecture supports his account of the independence of the deconstructive forces in the dialogues from Plato's intentions. To this, I reply very simply that, on Derridean grounds, there is no reason to attribute any doctrine to Plato, whether it be phonocentrism or a preference of speech over writing.

Derrida is unable to countenance the doctrine of the author's intention because he cannot distinguish between the text and life. In other words, he cannot distinguish between reading and writing. This is the last consequence of the Kantian interposition of a concept between the sign and its referent. The modern epoch begins in dissatisfaction with the unstable relation between vision and discourse, and terminates in the assimilation of vision by discourse. We are now able to construct deductive systems, whether in logic, semiotics, or grammatology. But these systems are about nothing, that is, nothing other than themselves. The original failure by the Stranger to carry out his threatened parricide, and not, as Derrida supposes, an actual parricide, has produced *logos*, but a *logos* with no referent, and hence, one which brings us face to face with the old problem of the altogether not. By the same token, it reduces to nothing the

Nietzschean distinction between noble and base nihilism, to say nothing of the Platonic distinction between the noble and the base. If I may employ a historical simile, as D'Alembert stands to Diderot, so Frege stands to Derrida. Let me finally balance this historical simile with a mathematical metaphor. Perhaps some mathematical prodigy of the day after tomorrow will devise a deconstructive semantics for modal logic. Perhaps this negation of the negation will catapult our children, if not ourselves, into the Hegelian Absolute. On this cheerful prophetic note, I conclude my remarks tonight.

Notes

- 1 *Symposium* 202d8–e7.
- 2 *Republic* VII, 509b9.
- 3 French text in *La Dissemination* (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1972).
- 4 *Phaedrus* 276a1–3; *Theaetetus* 189d7 ff; *Sophist* 263d10–e6.
- 5 *Laws* VII, 803c7 ff. Derrida: English, p. 158; French, p. 182.
- 6 *Letters* II, 314c1; VII, 341c1 ff.
- 7 *Theaetetus* 201d8.
- 8 *Republic* VII, 341c1 ff.
- 9 *Theaetetus* 210a7 ff.
- 10 I give three examples. 1. Socrates says that there are 12 gods, each of whom, led by Zeus, is in charge of a heavenly choir, except for Hestia who stays at home. This leaves eleven; 2. At 253c7 ff., Socrates summarizes his discussion of the soul and says that he divided it into three parts. This presumably refers to the charioteer and the two horses. But what of the wings, not to mention the chariot (about which Socrates is silent)? Other complications in this connection could be mentioned; 3. In the discussion following the speeches on love, Socrates blurs the question whether he delivered one speech or two; cf. 265a2 and 265c5 *et passim*.
- 11 *Republic* VI, 510b4 ff. (note the distinction between the mathematician's use of *dianoia* at 510d5–511a1, and the dialectician's use of *logos* in the sense of proceeding exclusively via Ideas, at 511b3 ff.); *Phaedrus* 265e1 ff. (the dialectician, like the butcher, carves at the natural joints), 266b3 ff. (Socrates is a lover of division and collection), 270d1 ff. (we must distinguish whether something is monoeidetic or polyeidetic, and determine its power); *Sophist* 218d2 and 235c4 (diaeresis is a kind of hunting), 253b8 ff. (dialectic, the science of free men, is the "spelling out" of formal structures); *Philebus* 15a1 ff. (diaeresis is eidetic numbering; cf. my *Plato's Sophist* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983; Reprint: South Bend, Ind.: St. Augustine's Press, 2004], pp. 61–83).
- 12 *Phaedrus* 246a3 ff.

- 13 *Ibid.*, 265b5 ff.
- 14 *Phaedrus* 242b8–9, 265b5 ff.; *Symposium* 203d4–e5.
- 15 See note 6 above and *Phaedrus* 276c3–d8.
- 16 E.g., *Phaedrus* 30e6; *Republic* VII, 536c1; *Gorgias* 517c4; *Philebus* 30e6; *Parmenides* 137b1–2. Consider also *Timaeus* 29a2 ff. together with 59c5–d3, and in general, the remark of Alcibiades at *Symposium* 216e4. Finally, *Gorgias* 485b7–e2.
- 17 As 257c4 ff. makes clear, we are from the outset concerned with the art of the *logographos*, hence with the union of speech and writing. Cf. 258d4–5, 259e1–2, 261b3–4, and 274b3–11.
- 18 *Phaedrus* 271b7–c4 and 271c10.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 274c5 ff. For Egyptian piety, cf. *Statesman* 290d6 ff.
- 20 *Ibid.*, 254a3 ff. At *Theaetetus* 173e1 ff., the *dianoia* functions below the earth, and stargazing above it. This passage comes close to attributing silence to the philosopher in terms analogous to those of the *Phaedrus*; i.e. conversation is restricted to the bodily existence within the polis.
- 21 Cf. *Theaetetus* 171d1 ff.
- 22 *Phaedrus* 248a1–b5.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 229b4 ff. (Oreithuia-Boreas), 229b7–9 (young girls); 230b1 ("by Hera!"), 234d5 (*synebakcheusa*), 238d1 (*nympholēptos*).
- 24 *Theaetetus* 149a4 ff.; cf. 152c8 and 154d3 for female oaths.
- 25 *Symposium* 221a8 ff.
- 26 *Charmides* 155c7 ff., esp. d3 ff.
- 27 *Gorgias* 485b7–e2.
- 28 *Symposium* 211b5.
- 29 English, p. 166; French, p. 192.
- 30 *Phaedrus* 276c3–10.
- 31 *Phaedrus* 276e1–3.
- 32 *Phaedrus* 257c1 ff.
- 33 *Statesman* 284c6.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 293c5 ff.; cf. *Meno* 88a1–d3 and 89a3–6 for a Socratic statement of the same view.
- 35 *Statesman* 300a1 ff.